THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

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ARTHUR GORDON
BRYAN MacMAHON
WILLIAM SAROYAN
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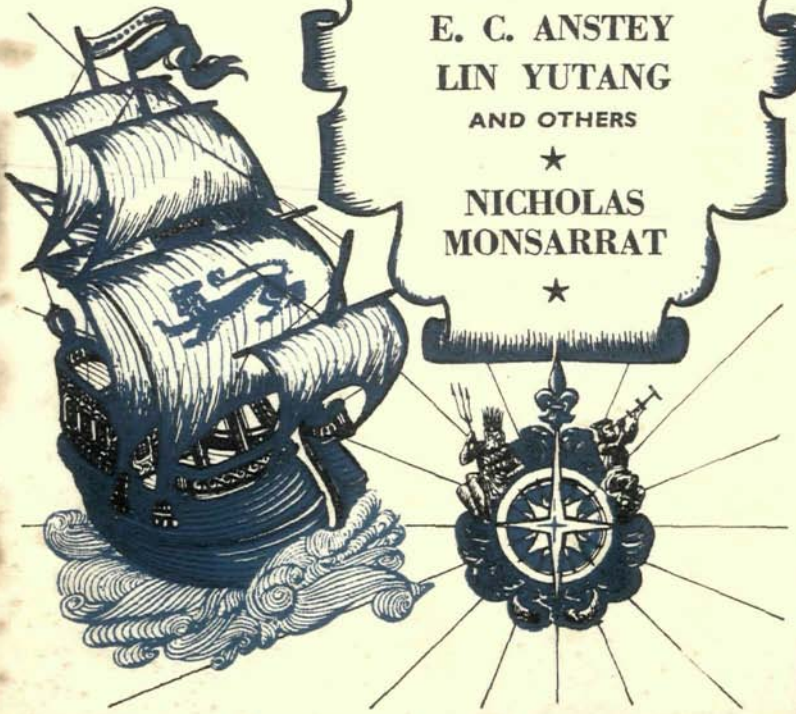

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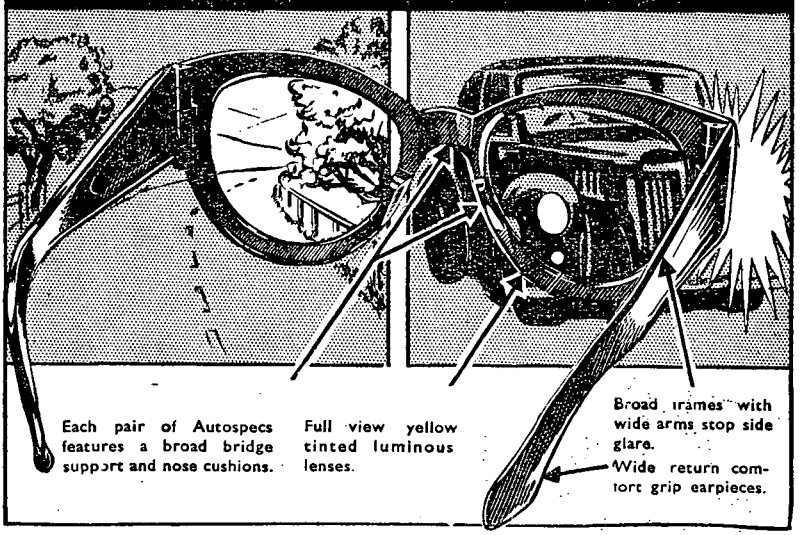
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Moonlit Apples

AT the top of the house the apples are laid in rows,
And the skylight lets the moonlight in, and those
Apples are deep-sea apples of green. There goes
A cloud on the moon in the autumn night.

A mouse in the wainscot scratches, and scratches, and then
There is no sound at the top of the house of men
Or mice ; and the cloud is blown, and the moon again
Dapples the apples with deep-sea light.

They are lying in rows there, under the gloomy beams ;
On the sagging floor ; they gather the silver streams
Out of the moon, those moonlit apples of dreams,
And quiet is the steep stair under.

In the corridors under there is nothing but sleep.
And stiller than ever on orchard boughs they keep
Tryst with the moon, and deep is the silence, deep
On moon-washed apples of wonder.

JOHN DRINKWATER

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PLAYING THE GOAT

As Sam's eye caught hers, her eyelid drooped to a full-blooded wink

by BRYAN MacMAHON

IN limestone countries it is a common phenomenon for a river to disappear through a fault in its bed: then, when all thought of it has been lost, it reappears in the green countryside some miles nearer the sea. There are similar faults in the river-bed of the human mind.

Trim Sam O'Neill, normal if peppery, a U.S. Naval pensioner, had retired to a cottage on the edge of the Irish sea-coast village in which he was born. The neighbours thought it capital to see Sam's clipped, white moustache stand out in rebel relief against his choleric complexion. He wore a turned-up hat, carried a black, slender cane, while his feet seemed dainty in canvas shoes stiff with layers of pipe-clay.

The most important offices of Sam's day were the milking of his goat and the tending of his rose trees. Yet, walking or working, he never ceased to keep a knowledgeable eye on the vagaries of the sea.

True it was to say that Sam sparkled in superannuation, yet memories of the Boxer and other rebellions prompted him to divide the world into two parts—the friendly and the hostile.

Once a month, on the day he received his pension, he temporarily lost his trimness in minor celebration. In the arrogance of alcohol he then referred to the barmaid in the local bar and to his old housekeeper, Minnie, as being positively hostile, both.

One gay spring morning, as was her custom, Old Minnie, hooped beneath the weight of the breakfast tray, wheezed up the little staircase to give Sam his breakfast in bed—this was the sole concession to indulgence the old sailor had promised himself during all his years at sea.

Entering the bedroom, Minnie found Sam sitting erect in bed with a remote stare in his eyes. The tassel at the end of his nightcap hung motionless. Through the opened lattice window behind his head the morning sea sparkled.

"Your breakfast!" the old woman said gruffly. She had spoken thus on two thousand similar mornings.

Sam did not reply. He continued to gaze fiercely at the

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small mahogany wash-stand, on which stood a blue-rimmed basin and ewer.

" Your breakfast ! " the woman said again.

" How dare you ? " Sam erupted.

Minnie straightened her old back. " How dare I what ? " she inquired with astonishment.

" Speak like that to a man who is dead ! "

The old lady looked patiently all around the room. " Dead ! Who's dead ? " she asked.

" *I'm* dead ! " Sam said in sepulchral tones.

Old Minnie gave a high " he-he-he " of tolerance.

" Take the cap off your egg an' see if it is boiled to your likin'," she said. Her fussing indicated that she wished Sam to make a small lap on which she could set her burden.

" Listen, you homely-lookin' clam ! " Sam said fiercely, jostling the tray away, causing the delf to rattle, the egg to roll out of its egg-cup, and the tea to flop over into the saucer.

" I, Samuel O'Neill, passed away this mornin' early in the middle watch. The tide was ebbin'. The wind was S.S.W. How dare you pester a corpse with your infernal breakfast ? "

" Well ! " said Minnie, backing a pace or two. Then, with the natural resilience of womankind, she said : " If you're dead itself a nicely-boiled egg an' a cup of fresh tea won't do you a mite of harm. Get started for yourself ! "

Fiercely : " Be off, you hostile wretch ! "

" Well ! " said the old woman. The tray in her hands prevented her from crossing herself in amazement. " Well ! " she said again, then took a few steps backwards towards the bedroom door. There she turned. Sam was gazing with rapt attention at the blue-rimmed wash-set.

Old Minnie proceeded down the stairs, talking away twenty to the dozen under her breath. As she placed the tray on the scrubbed deal kitchen table there came a loud knocking with a cane on the floor of the room over her head.

" What is it now ? " she asked from the stair-foot.

" I want a crape an' a mournin' envelope. Also four tacks."

With a touch of sarcasm : " Anythin' else you want ? "

" I'll give instructions about my coffin an' grave later. Be quick about it, or I'll go after you with the stick."

Old Minnie draped her shawl about her shoulders and shuffled out of the front door. On her way to the gate she hunted the goat away from the rose trees. The thought of milking Jenny on her return caused the old woman to draw a deep sigh—Jenny was a red devil to milk unless Sam's soft fingers were on her teats.

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The old woman walked up-village and entered the local inn. To one end of the bar was appended a department which carried an assortment of odds and ends. The barmaid was skimming the froth off a pint of stout with a flick of a whalebone ruler: she was a fine woman still though her enemies would say that she had missed the full tide of wedlock.

In the bar corner sat four early and morose customers. The door from the bar to the kitchen stood fully open, so that Shamus the Shop, even while eating, could keep an ear on his affairs.

"A crape, a mournin' envelope, an' four tacks," Minnie demanded.

The barmaid turned. Concernment was written on her face.

"Who's *dead?*" all present asked together.

Wiping rasher-grease from his lips, Shamus the Shop waddled through the kitchen door. His eyes were dilated with curiosity.

"Dead? Nobody that I know of," Old Minnie said.

"What manner of answer is this?" Shamus demanded. "Who are you gettin' the message for?"

"For Sam," said Minnie.

The barmaid's features grew rigid. "Is Sam . . . ?" she began.

"Sam is fine, only . . ."

"Only what?" all present asked together.

"He declares that he died this mornin' as the tide was ebbin'."

The people present opened their mouths in astonishment. One of the customers ventured to laugh. The barmaid looked sharply in his direction.

"Where is he now?" asked Shamus the Shop.

"Sittin' up in bed an' starin' out before him at the blue ewer an' basin," Minnie replied. The fat publican pursed his lips. He wiped his fingers and rustled them as he walked meditatively in front of the gleaming rows of bottles.

"Ha!" he said, "Sam is too good a customer to be allowed get into the jigs. He was all right when he was here last night in the company of Jacky-the-Bathing-Boxes. Another thing, his pension is due—it should be here today or tomorrow." He peered at the topmost and dustiest shelves of the bar-room.

"A drop of Nelson's Blood should resurrect Sam O'Neill for another decade," he commented sagely.

"Nelson's Blood mebbe has him as he is," Old Minnie said gravely. Then: "Give me my message. I have to try my hand at milkin' a wild, unnatural goat."

On her return to the cottage, Minnie handed Sam the black-bordered envelope together with the pen and ink. Sitting erect in bed with the tassel of his nightcap wagging like a weary

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pendulum, he wrote his own obituary notice in a round, innocent hand completely at variance with his hedgehog personality.

Samuel O'Neill died 21 April. Remains will be removed . . .

He cogitated for a long time on the wisdom of adding the letters *R.I.P.* to the inscription. His pause was due to the fact that the local parish priest and himself were accustomed to drive sparks from one another's metal on the question of a hereafter.

After a while Sam yielded, presumably acting on the principle that the addition of these three significant letters would place the matter of his death beyond yea or nay. The envelope he then handed to the open-mouthed housekeeper. "Nail that to the door! Admit the neighbours to pay their respects."

Minnie reckoned that the moment had come to make her routine stand. "Not a finger will I lay on it!" she said, with open hysteria in her voice.

The long-shirted, lean-shanked corpse leapt out of the bed and bounded before her to the bedroom door. With trembling fingers the old woman took the proffered envelope. Back in bed again, Sam nodded his approval as he heard the noise of tacks being driven into his front door. "Draw the blinds, you goose," he shouted, when the noise of hammering had ended.

The blinds came squeaking down on their sea-rusted rollers.

Sam raised his voice: "No flowers! No candles! No snuff! Order my coffin from James Henebry. Have no shoulders to my box an' use the minimum of mountin's. Play *Dixie* on the gramophone when my funeral is leavin' the house."

"The divil give you *Dixie*!" shouted the old woman from the comparative safety of the stair-foot. "God forgive you your sins, you're no more dead than myself! You have the white lard terrified out o' me with your jack-actin'. I'm finished with daftness! Without hurt or harm to you, that you may die roarin' like Doran's bull an' be pounded in brimstone."

While she was speaking, Minnie's trembling fingers made a brave feint at loosening the bow-knot at the back of her apron.

Sam smiled with grim satisfaction. A woman letting off steam—the ultimatum had little significance.

There came a subdued, reverent knock at the front door. Leading a crocodile of mourning men and women from the village came Jacky-the-Bathing-Boxes complete with the cold drop at the end of his grog-blossomed nose. Jacky was undersized, with rheumy eyes, and his breathing evidenced his perpetual bronchitis. He stood on the threshold twirling his threadbare cap. Behind him the neighbours made the murmurs appropriate to the melancholy occasion.

Jacky began: "The poor fellow! Not addicted to religion,

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but had his own peculiar standards. I hope he'll find the other world friendly an' not hostile. Ha-ha-ha!" With a sudden alertness, he asked Minnie: "To whom did he leave the house?"

"I wouldn't know!" Minnie said fiercely.

"Don't ate me!" was Jacky's retort.

"God forbid that I should," said the old woman.

Jacky grew calm. "Where is he laid out?" he asked.

Minnie jerked her thumb in the direction of the stairs. Jacky climbed. The others followed.

As he went up the stairs Jacky held conversation with his own boots: "Ah, boots," he said, looking downwards, "many's the night ye came up them stairs an' me an' my chum blue-mouldy to God an' the stars. Never no more, boots! Ye can say good-bye to gay days!" Then with an unearthly cackle he turned to those behind him: "Oul' Nick has him by the hasp, now or never!" he shouted. The harsh laugh of sycophancy lasted the mourners as far as the bedroom door.

Sam was sitting up in bed gazing at the wash-stand. Jacky said instinctively: "Excuse me!" as if he had inadvertently entered a bathing-box wherein a lady was semi-dressed. After a terrified step backwards, Jacky roared out: "Under heaven high, what's the meanin' of this?"

For a moment or two there was a dreadful hullabaloo on the stairs. Word went out that Sam was leppin' alive and that there would be no wake.

The corpse put his finger to his lips. The tassel on the night-cap swung slowly as Sam wagged his head from side to side.

"Speak easy!" Sam whispered. "I'm . . . you know . . ."

"Ooh!" said the Greek chorus. Then, "Oh! Oh! Oh!" went falling downstairs like a hopping ball.

With all the brazenness of which he was capable, Jacky said: "For a minnit you frightened the daylights out o' me." With an unsettled whinny, he added: "I always knew that the barmaid was runnin' poteen through the good whisky. Is it fair to ask you, Sam, will you soon be gettin' up? You must remember that today or tomorrow is pension day."

"Ssssh!" said the dead man. "Dead I am!"

The marvelling mourners crowded in to make a ring of astonishment around the bed.

"Throw away your dead man!" laughed one man.

"You'll see the cool hundred!" said a second.

"You'll put many of those present under the green sod!" said a third. Sam glared at the mourners.

Minnie shouted up from the kitchen: "Come down, Sam

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O'Neill, the goat is beltin' hell out o' the apple tree. She won't allow me to lay a finger on her ! "

Sam continued to stare in front of him. It was evident that his patience was drawing to its end. As the mourners began to implore of him to get out of bed, he pursed his lips.

Suddenly he began to shout at the top of his voice : " Early in the middle watch, I, Samuel O'Neill, died. The tide was ebbin'. Wind was south-south-west. No flowers ! No candles !"

" No funeral ! " shouted Minnie from the bottom of the stairs. " The cursed goat is puckin' the divil out o' the front door."

Before the corpse could retort, the postman was at the front door shooing the goat away. Shamus the Shop, accompanied by the barmaid, wearing her black hat, followed close behind.

The postman was waving an American letter high over his head. " Sam's cow has calved ! " he said lugubriously, " an', look ye, he ups an' dies the mornin' of the event. Well, well ! If some people had ducks they'd be drowned ! "

In the doorway Shamus the Shop wiped his mouth. At the stair-head Jacky-the-Boxes relieved his nose of the cold drop. The friendly barmaid showed a distinct tendency to shed tears.

" Gi' me the envelope ! " said Minnie, snatching it from the postman's hand.

Grabbing pen and ink, she thumped upstairs. " Sign it ! " she said, tearing open the envelope and placing the pay-docket under Sam's nose.

Sam drew an other-world sigh. " I couldn't sign it ! " he said. " It wouldn't be right to draw a pension for a dead man."

" This bangs Banagher ! " said all the onlookers together.

Shamus the Shop, who had with difficulty mounted the stairs, was inclined truculently to button his coat. The barmaid, too who was now present, had turned momentarily hostile.

Unpredictably there came the mimicry of thunder as the goat pucked and butted on the front door. At the sound the barmaid got a gay gleam in her right eye.

" Bring up that goat ! " she sang out.

" A goat in a bedroom ! "—Minnie had bridled up—" Across my dead body, you doxy ! "

" Bring up that goat ! " shouted the barmaid, now completely hostile. " Also a three-legged stool and a clean vessel."

Jenny was lifted bodily and shuttled upstairs to the bedroom. There she was set down upon the polished floor. She seemed quite queenly and wholly at home in her new surroundings. Her little hooves found some difficulty in gaining purchase on the polished linoleum.

Recognizing her master in the bed, she gave a small bleat of

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pleasure—and of complaint. In the breasts of all the women present, maternal instincts began to do their fell work.

" God help us ! " sighed one old matron, fully understanding the goat's dilemma. " Motherhood ! " groaned a second.

" The plight of the poor creature ! " said a third. A spinster, this, who suffered vicariously.

Sam O'Neill continued to glare steadfastly at the blue-rimmed ewer and basin. As again the goat bleated, it was evident that Sam's mouth-corners were giving him trouble. Also he was compelled to entwine his rebellious fingers. At the third bleat, with a little " phut " of annoyance, Sam, shanks and all, leapt out of bed, glared at the bystanders, harshly adjusted the stool to his liking and set fiercely about milking his goat. His old toes did astonishing, sympathetic gyrations on the linoleum as he implored the goat to yield nutrition.

The women appeared to grow fat and placid with watching. An angelic smile adorned each mouth. Never since the beginning of time had the milking of a goat been so completely analysed : its rise to its peak, its fall, its dwindling away into reluctant, soundless threads of cobweb milk.

When the last drop was extracted from the udder, the women, spinster and all, issued a communal sigh of satisfaction. Sam skipped back into bed, somewhat like a goat himself. Jenny was lifted up and borne downstairs in triumph.

The barmaid stood in the mid-bedroom proudly holding the vessel of milk. Turning to Minnie, she whispered : " Warm a saucepan of the milk and give it to me in a large mug."

After a suitable interval, Minnie was back with the mug.

" The Nelson's Blood ! " the barmaid said to her boss.

Shamus the Shop reached for his hip. The barmaid poured a generous lacing of whisky into the steaming liquid. Then to Sam she said masterfully : " Drink or I'll swing for you ! "

Sam looked up in terror at her hostile face, then licked his dry lips, and set his mouth to the vessel.

As the draught drew to its end, it was clear that Sam was drowsy. One by one the spectators tiptoed from the room. The barmaid was the last to leave. Smilingly, she wound Sam's watch—the creaking of the winder proved soporific to the old sailor. She took the jug out of his dreamy hand.

" Sleep tight ! " she whispered as Sam sank back on the pillow. Then there was utter peace in the room where the sounds of the village were muted by the salt sea air.

Sam slept the clock round. He awoke to find the sun shining. He drew a deep breath, then looked at his watch. " What !

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Eight o'clock ? " he said. He bellowed for his breakfast. Minnie mounted a few steps of the stairs. " Breakfast ? " she shouted. " I thought you were dead ! "

" Bring me my food, you hostile wretch ! " Then : " Did my pension come ? "

" Ay ! It came yesterday."

" Yesterday ! Why was it concealed from me ? Bring it up this instant ! "

Breakfast over, he sprang out of bed. A glance out of his front window revealed the sea in capital mood. He waved joyously to Jenny, who had a cabbage-leaf in her mouth. He danced a snatch of a hornpipe on the floor of his room.

Going downstairs, he milked the goat, then strolled abroad in the light air of morning, bearing with him the aristocracy of his moustache, his brilliant cane, and his pipe-clayed shoes.

" Your goat—is she milking well ? " asked the priest.

" Capital, friend ! Why do you ask ? " Sam asked sharply.

" Nothing ! Nothing ! " The priest solemnly passed on.

" Bunkey-doodle-i-do ! " Sam muttered, glaring after him.

Smiles and salutes came to him from all sides. The men smiled, remembering the tassel at the end of the nightcap. The women smiled, remembering the purring of the udder-fresh milk.

To Sam's eyes never before had the sea been more blue-green nor the tumbling waves so excitingly white nor the floor of the cove more gloriously tawny. Before long he felt a prince indeed.

In the bar-room the barmaid was polishing the glasses. Her back was turned to the doorway as Sam entered. First she smiled warmly into an open space in the mirror at the back of the serried bottles ; as Sam's eye caught hers in the reflection her eyelid drooped to a full-blooded wink.

" Draw me a drink, you homely-lookin' clam ! " Sam snorted.

The barmaid remained smiling into the mirror. On a sudden impulse Sam winked back at her. This done, the old pensioner felt revitalized and even jaunty. His flared nostrils indicated his deep sense of joyousness. As the woman bent to draw the drink, he felt old glory seep through him.

The world was devoid of hostility and was now completely friendly. Though he alone was unaware of it, it was clear that the underground river had come up laughing and sparkling, its clear waters sieving in beauty between green fields.

★ ★ ★

Originality is undetected plagiarism.

WILLIAM RALPH INGE

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THE BIKE

"The radio appeal wasn't to you," his father said

by WILLIAM SAROYAN

THERE was a chicken hiding under a parked car on Van Ness Avenue, in the heart of the town, on the first rainless day after eleven nights and days of storm, after the floods; and three cars farther down the street, there was a small dog hiding under another car.

He'd never have noticed them on his way home from the public library if they hadn't been so upset about something. The chicken, a big hen with mottled black-and-white feathers, was making noises that were for all the world almost human; and the little dog, a common lost dog not more than twice the size of a cat, was whimpering the same way, making almost the same appeal.

He'd passed the chicken, astonished that it was there at all and half believing it must belong to the owners of the car, and then he came upon the dog.

It was after six, the streets were almost deserted, he was late for supper. He'd been to the library examining the whole place—not one book, not one shelf of them, but the whole library, looking into one book after another, as if he were in search of something and knew what it was but just couldn't find it.

Whenever he was at the public library and got to searching that way, he forgot time and supper and everything else, sometimes feeling glad about his luck, about drawing nearer to what he was looking for, and sometimes feeling depressed and miserable, believing his search was hopeless. He hadn't been there once during the storm and the floods. The excitement of the weather ran through the town, the state, the whole nation, and he did his share of work at the swollen river.

He rode out to Skaggs Bridge on his bicycle one afternoon in answer to a radio appeal, riding six miles in heavy rain. There he got on a truck with twenty others, none of them under sixteen. He was twelve, and eager to prove that at twelve years old you are quite man enough to help in a flood.

The truck travelled over muddy roads along the river until it came to where the river was nearest to flooding over. The

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men all smoked in the truck, and the boy took a cigarette when it was offered and tried his best to smoke it. He stayed with the men from five in the afternoon until one in the morning, and worked as hard as any of them. He stopped for coffee and sandwiches and doughnuts only when the others did, and together they put up a high bank.

But when the truck got back to the store at Skaggs Bridge, where he'd left his bike, the bike was gone.

He came near to tears, because he'd bought the bike with money it had taken him a long time to save, and he loved it. Besides, he needed it. He rode to school on it.

He hadn't believed there would be anybody in the world in weather like that, in the worst storm in a whole century, during a time of flood, when he had gone to the trouble of riding all that way to help, who would want to steal a bike.

It just wasn't a time to be mean or to take advantage or to steal. In other weather, it might be half human to go off with somebody else's bicycle; but he didn't think anybody alive, having lived through the storm, would have had any interest at all in going off with somebody else's bicycle.

He asked the old man in the store about the bike, telling where he'd put it and the kind it was. Not a new or fancy bike, it was one he'd bought from Paul Saydak, who'd been rebuilding bikes for twenty years in Fresno, working in the barn behind his house, on Oleander Avenue. It was a lean bike, but strong, and Paul Saydak had let him have it for $27.50, although Paul said it was one of the best he had ever put together, and he said it ought to be worth every bit of $35.

The old man in the store, at half-past one in the morning, hardly knew what the boy was talking about; but he understood that the boy's bike had been swiped, and he couldn't help feeling upset about it. He didn't understand the part about Paul Saydak, but he went outside and let the boy point out to him where he had put the bike.

Then he told the boy he hadn't been at the store at that time, 5 o'clock in the afternoon, so he hadn't seen the bike at all. He said he would ask about it, though. He went to the driver of the truck and asked him to get the boy home.

The next day, the boy had had to take a bus to school; and the next afternoon, he'd had to hitch a ride to Skaggs Bridge to ask at the store about his bike. But nobody there knew what he was talking about, and he himself felt he was making quite a lot of a $27.50 bike in weather like that, the river free in a dozen different places, and millions of dollars lost in damage of all kinds.

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The bike was gone, that was all. And there wasn't a great deal of interest in the fact that it *was* gone, or in the circumstances in which he had given anybody the best chance in the world to make off with it. He'd listened to the radio appeal for help, he'd got on his bike, he'd gone as fast as he could go to where they'd asked him to go, and there somebody had swiped his bike.

"The radio appeal wasn't to *you*," his father said quietly when the family sat in the living-room after dinner the night after the bike had been stolen.

"I thought it was," the boy said.

"No," his father said. "It was to—well, *me*, and, of course, I didn't go. Yes, the river *is* swollen, and it *has* been raining very hard night and day, and a lot of places *are* flooded, and a lot of other things. But I don't think they expect *you* to straighten things out, or even *help* straighten them out.

"They expect *me* to, I think, and—well, I'm too tired. By the time I get through eight hours at my desk, I'm too tired. I just want to get out of the rain, have supper, listen to the wireless, and go to bed. You might have known they'd steal your bike. You only wanted to help. You might have known they'd do that."

"I didn't think they would," the boy said.

"Well, they did," his father said. "And since they did, and since they had no right to, no right in the world, no right even to be *tempted* to steal it—somebody at the store should have taken it inside and put it away for you somewhere—well, I'm going to buy you a new bike. Any kind you want. Any time you want it. *Tomorrow*. You pick it out and I'll buy it."

"That's not it," the boy said. "I don't want a new bike."

"Well, you've lost the old one," his father said. "Pick out the one you want and I'll buy it."

"I liked my bike because I'd bought it with money I'd earned myself," he said.

He was a little angry with his father for being so angry with whoever had stolen his bike, and with people in general. He knew his father was sympathetic and *did* want him to have a bike; but he didn't like to see his father so angry about people and things in general. The angrier his father got with people, the kinder he became with the family.

"Perhaps it's just as well," his mother said to his father. "So few boys nowadays ride bikes to school, and motorists are so careless. Perhaps it's just as well he's had it stolen. It's always made me worry. Must you have another bike, Barney?"

"Of course he must," his father said.

"No," the boy said. "I think I'd rather not have one."

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"I'm sure he doesn't want a new bike," his mother said.

"Oh, *are* you?" his father said. He turned to the boy and said, "I leave it to you, Barney. Think about it and let me know. Now, we'll forget all about it."

His father looked at his mother, his two younger brothers looked from their mother to their father and then to their older brother, and then his mother sat down at the piano and played an evening song. Soon they were all singing. The song was *Rescue the Perishing*, his father's favourite.

He went by bus to school after that. It wasn't half as much fun as riding his bike, but it was all right. He couldn't move as freely and as swiftly as he'd moved for a year—for the year he'd had the bike. And every now and then he forgot that the bike had been swiped, so that when he stepped out of the house or out of school, he believed he was on his way to his bike and a quick ride to wherever he was going.

Five days after the bike had been stolen, he took the bus after school and rode to town and went to the public library.

He took the place shelf by shelf, forgetting the bike and his father's anger about its being stolen. He read parts of plays, short stories, novels, travel books, histories, biographies, and philosophy books. Everything he read seemed fresh and good and new, but not what he wanted, not what he was searching for.

He was in the public library for hours, sitting down at last to read a story, not knowing the name of the story or who the writer was, and not stopping until the story came to a description of a meal, making him hungry. He looked at the clock and saw that it was twenty past six. His father would be getting home in a few minutes, and supper would start in half an hour.

He left the book open on the table and hurried out of the library to the street. The sky was clear and the air seemed clean and fresh, as if nobody had ever breathed it. If he waited for a bus, he might not get home any sooner than if he walked, so he decided to cut through town and enjoy a swift glance at anything he came to, and then get on home. It was a walk of about a mile and a half, but he felt like walking.

When he heard the chicken under the parked car on Van Ness Avenue, he couldn't imagine what was making such a sorrowful appeal for help. Every day, the paper was full of stories about strange things that had happened to people and animals during the storm and flood—and, of course, one of the things that had happened, which nobody except him and his family knew about, was that his bike had been stolen—so he felt the noise he was hearing also had to do with the storm, and that somebody or

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something was hurt or lost or frightened. But he didn't expect it to be a chicken, and he didn't expect it to be under a car.

He was some time finding out what it was and where it was, and when he saw that it was a rather big chicken under the car, he didn't feel that he ought to try to do something for it. It might just belong to the people who owned the car, and they might think he was stealing it.

But when he came to the whimpering dog, he knew it belonged to no one, and he was sure he couldn't just leave it there. He called to the dog, but the dog was afraid of him. It took a good three or four minutes to stop the dog from being afraid. The dog crawled out from under the car, still struggling with its fear, crawling all the way to the boy.

He was very slow and gentle, speaking to the dog softly and not touching it for some time. At last he began to stroke the dog's head. The dog got to its feet and barked, but all it could manage was just one little bark.

He picked it up and walked back to the car under which the chicken was still alone and terrified. Well, a dog's one thing, however scared or sick it may be, and a chicken's another, and he couldn't imagine how to speak to the chicken so that it would not take him for an enemy.

He set the dog down on the pavement and said, " Now, you just stand there. I'm going to take you home and give you some food and a warm place to sleep, but I've got to get this chicken, too."

The dog watched him and listened to his voice, but couldn't stand still and couldn't understand. It managed to bark again once. It was a mongrel with soft brown hair and sad eyes, part cocker, part terrier, and part two or three other things. It ran off a little, whimpering, and then came back and asked if the boy wanted it to go away. Whimpering softly, it seemed to say, " Don't ask that. Don't want me to go away."

And the boy said, " Now, will you just stand there a minute while I see about the chicken ? There's a lost chicken under the car here that I've got to take home and take care of, too."

The dog seemed to understand a little, so the boy went round to the back of the car, where the hen was sitting as if it were laying or hatching. He began to talk to it; but a bird is a bird, even if it's a hen, and a bird, even if it's lost and sick, has got to be afraid of a human being.

The hen got to its feet, but not all the way up ; not because there wasn't room enough under the car, but because in fear, all creatures, even man, do not rise to their full height ; only in pride or exultation do they stand very tall, as men do when they

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are glad about themselves, or as roosters do when they are overwhelmed about themselves and must push themselves to the limits of themselves, and then, half dying with joy, crow about who they are and what they can do.

The lost hen wobbled to the next car, and then to the third car, the boy going after it slowly and speaking to it softly. He had to crawl under the third car to reach the hen and bring it out.

When the dog saw the hen, it began to dance, growling softly—partly, perhaps, because it was a dog and the bird was a bird, and partly, perhaps, because another lost creature had been rescued.

"All right," the boy said to both of them. "Now we're going home."

The dog stayed close to the boy's heels, barking now and then, and the hen stopped being frightened and seemed, even, to fall asleep, or at least half asleep.

When the boy got home, he picked up the dog and went in through the back door. The family were at the dining-room table.

"Barney?" his mother called out.

"Yes," he said.

He stepped into the dining-room, the dog under one arm, the chicken under the other, the eyes of both creatures open and unsure. Everybody at the table stared at them.

"I found them," the boy said. "They were hiding under cars on Van Ness Avenue. They were both crying. I thought I'd better bring them home."

"Orphans of the storm, is that it?" the father said. "That's not a bad-looking dog."

"Can I keep them?" the boy asked.

"A dog and a chicken, Barney?" the mother said.

"They won't be any trouble," he said. "I'll fix up a small coop with a nest and a perch for the hen, and the dog can sleep in a box in the garage. Can I keep them?"

"Can he?" his father asked his mother.

"Well," his mother said, "are you sure you want to? I mean, nobody keeps chickens in their gardens any more, and dogs—*some* dogs—have a way of getting the people who own them into a lot of trouble."

"I'd like to keep them," the boy said. "They were lost. Nobody wanted them. I found them. They were afraid of me. I had to talk to them. It wasn't easy, especially the hen. I didn't buy them, but I do feel they are mine, and I'd like to keep them."

"Well," his mother said. She turned to his father. "Are you sure it's all right?" she said.

"I don't know why not," his father said.

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" All right," his mother said. She got up. " I'll help you put them away until after you've had your supper."

" No," the boy said. " You go ahead. They're both hungry." He looked down at the dog and the hen and noticed that they were looking at each other and weren't afraid of each other any more. " I'll give the dog a little warm milk to start with, and the hen maybe a little rice or something. I won't be a minute. You sit down, Mother."

His mother went to the kitchen with him and warmed milk for the dog. The boy set the chicken on the floor, and his mother sprinkled rice in front of it, and soon both creatures began to eat and come alive.

After supper, the boy went to the garage with his brothers, and together they fixed the hen a small coop with a perch and a nest, and the dog a little house, made out of a small box, with rags on the bottom for a bed.

While they were out in the garage, the boy's father and mother sat in the living-room and talked.

" Well, he's said nothing about a bike so far," the man said. " That bike meant everything in the world to him. You know it did."

" Yes," the woman said, " but *that* bike only. *His* bike. The bike he bought with his own money. No other bike can take its place. Something else has got to."

" A stray dog and a tired old hen ? " the man said.

" Well, yes," the woman said. " They're *his*. I don't think he'll ever have another bike. I don't think he'll ever want another one. The next time he saves up some money, he'll buy something else. But he did love his bike. It became part of him. He knows it's gone for ever, though."

" Then I shouldn't surprise him and bring home a bike ? " the man said.

" No," the woman said. " He wouldn't like it. Not *really*, I mean. Oh, he'd like it, of course, but you know what I mean. It couldn't possibly be what his own bike was, and it's no good having anything that isn't the best that can be had of its kind."

" Yes, I suppose so," the man said. " Well, it was quite a storm at that, wasn't it ? "

" Yes," the woman said. " Everybody's talked of nothing else."

" I can't imagine," the man said, " why you let him ride his bike all the way out to Skaggs Bridge in the rain to help."

" Can you imagine my asking him *not* to ? " the woman said. " He wanted to. It seemed silly, of course ; but it wasn't silly

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to him, and he *did* help. I mean, he did actually do the same work as everybody else."

The man shut his eyes a moment to see if he could see his son racing through the rain to the swollen river, and he *did* see him; he saw the whole thing very clearly. He opened his eyes and laughed quietly, for he knew he would never stop seeing a boy on a bike riding to the rescue of the world, to the loss of his own bike and the forfeiture of his own exemption from moral responsibility.

The woman laughed, too, and then both of them quickly stopped laughing to resume their expressions of earnestness; for they heard him down the hall with his brothers, all of them on their way to the living-room.

"We'll sing that same song after a minute," the man whispered. "*Rescue the Perishing.*"

"Yes," the woman said.

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TALKING THROUGH OUR HATS!

Whose hat is it? Score one mark for recognizing the wearer of each hat, one mark for the title of the work in which the wearer appears, and one for the author, making a total of 24. The answers are on page 96.

1. *His hat was a hundred and two feet wide,*
   With ribbons and bibbons on every side.
2. *It was her hat, I think—it looked as though it were in a hurry and couldn't stay very long.*
3. *His friends thought he must be in love. "He brushes his hat o' mornings; what should that bode?" they asked.*
4. *He paced the platform, his tall gaunt figure made even gaunter by his long grey travelling cloak and close-fitting cloth cap.*
5. *This bonnet, seen on the road, caused a poet to change his intention and write a sonnet.*
6. *One of the cocks of his hat having fallen down, this old seaman let it hang from that day forth, though it was a great annoyance when it blew.*
7. *You are too much of a poet to know the state a woman finds her house in when she's been away for three weeks. Give me my rug. (He obeys.) Now my hat. (He puts it into the hand which has the bag.) Now open the door for me.*
8. *Take off your hat, said the King, but the witness explained that it was not his.*

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SEA DEVIL

He felt the razor-sharp barnacles bite into his hand

by ARTHUR GORDON

THE man came out of the house and stood quite still, listening. Behind him, the lights glowed in the cheerful room, the books were neat and orderly in their cases, the wireless talked importantly to itself. In front of him, the bay stretched dark and silent, one of the countless lagoons that border the coast where Florida thrusts its great green thumb deep into the tropics.

It was late in September. The night was breathless; summer's dead hand still lay heavy on the land. The man moved forward six paces and stood on the sea-wall. He dropped his cigarette and noted where the tiny spark hissed and went out. The tide was beginning to ebb.

Somewhere out in the blackness a mullet jumped and fell back with a sullen splash. Heavy with roe, they were jumping less often, now. They would not take a hook, but a practised eye could see the swirls they made in the glassy water.

In the dark of the moon, a skilled man with a cast-net might take half a dozen in an hour's work. And a big mullet makes a meal for a family.

The man turned abruptly and went into the garage, where his cast-net hung. He was in his late twenties, wide-shouldered and strong. He did not have to fish for a living, or even for food. He was a man who worked with his head, not with his hands. But he liked to go casting alone at night.

He liked the loneliness and the labour of it. He liked the clean taste of salt when he gripped the edge of the net with his teeth as a cast-netter must. He liked the arching flight of sixteen pounds of lead and linen against the starlight, and the weltering crash of the net into the unsuspecting water.

He liked the harsh tug of the retrieving rope around his wrist, and the way the net came alive when the cast was true, and the thud of captured fish on the floor boards of the skiff.

He liked all that because he found in it a reality that seemed to be missing from his twentieth-century job and from his daily

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life. He liked being the hunter, skilled and solitary and elemental. There was no conscious cruelty in the way he felt. It was the way things had been in the beginning.

The man lifted the net down carefully and lowered it into a bucket. He put a paddle beside the bucket. Then he went into the house. When he came out, he was wearing swimming-trunks and a pair of old tennis shoes. Nothing else.

The skiff, flat-bottomed, was moored off the sea-wall. He would not go far, he told himself. Just to the tumbledown dock half a mile away. Mullet had a way of feeding around old pilings after dark.

If he moved quietly, he might pick up two or three in one cast close to the dock. And maybe a couple of others on the way down or back.

He shoved off and stood motionless for a moment, letting his eyes grow accustomed to the dark. Somewhere out in the channel a porpoise blew with a sound like steam escaping. The man smiled a little ; porpoises were his friends.

Once, fishing in the Gulf, he had seen the charter-boat captain reach overside and gaff a baby porpoise through the sinewy part of the tail. He had hoisted it aboard, had dropped it into the bait-well, where it thrashed around, puzzled and unhappy. And the mother had swum alongside the boat and under the boat and around the boat, nudging the stout planking with her back, slapping it with her tail, until the man felt sorry for her and made the captain let the baby porpoise go.

He took the net from the bucket, slipped the noose in the retrieving rope over his wrist, pulled the slip-knot tight. It was an old net, but still serviceable ; he had rewoven the rents made by underwater snags. He coiled the thirty-foot rope carefully, making sure there were no kinks. A tangled rope, he knew, would spoil any cast.

The basic design of the net had not changed in three thousand years. It was a mesh circle with a diameter of fourteen feet. It measured close to fifteen yards round the circumference and could, if thrown perfectly, blanket a hundred and fifty square feet of sea-water.

In the centre of this radial trap was a small iron collar where the retrieving rope met the twenty-three separate drawstrings leading to the outer rim of the net. Along this rim, spaced an inch and a half apart, were the heavy lead sinkers.

The man raised the iron collar until it was a foot above his head. The net hung soft and pliant and deadly. He shook it gently, making sure that the drawstrings were not tangled, that

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the sinkers were hanging true. Then he eased it down and picked up the paddle.

The night was black as a witch's cat; the stars looked fuzzy and dim. Down to southward, the lights of a causeway made a yellow necklace across the sky. To the man's left were the tangled roots of a mangrove swamp; to his right, the open waters of the bay. Most of it was fairly shallow, but there were channels eight feet deep.

The man could not see the old dock, but he knew where it was. He pulled the paddle quietly through the water, and the phosphorescence glowed and died.

For five minutes he paddled. Then, twenty feet ahead of the skiff, a mullet jumped. A big fish, close to three pounds. For a moment it hung in the still air, gleaming dully. Then it vanished. But the ripples marked the spot, and where there was one there were often others.

The man stood up quickly. He picked up the coiled rope, and with the same hand grasped the net at a point four feet below the iron collar. He raised the skirt to his mouth, gripped it strongly with his teeth. He slid his free hand as far as it would go down the circumference of the net so that he had three points of contact with the mass of cordage and metal. He made sure his feet were planted solidly.

Then he waited, feeling the tension that is older than the human race, the fierce exhilaration of the hunter at the moment of ambush, the atavistic desire to capture and kill and ultimately consume.

A mullet swirled, ahead and to the left. The man swung the heavy net back, twisting his body and bending his knees so as to get more upward thrust. He shot it forward, letting go simultaneously with rope hand and with teeth, holding a fraction of a second longer with the other hand so as to give the net the necessary spin, impart the centrifugal force that would make it flare into a circle. The skiff ducked sideways, but he kept his balance. The net fell with a splash.

The man waited for five seconds. Then he began to retrieve it, pulling in a series of sharp jerks so that the drawstrings would gather the net inward, like a giant fist closing on this segment of the teeming sea. He felt the net quiver, and knew it was not empty.

He swung it, dripping, over the gunwale, saw the broad silver side of the mullet quivering, saw, too, the gleam of a smaller fish. He looked closely to make sure no sting ray was hidden in the mesh, then raised the iron collar and shook the net out. The mullet fell with a thud and flapped wildly.

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The other victim was an angel-fish, beautifully marked, but too small to keep. The man picked it up gently and dropped it overboard. He coiled the rope, took up the paddle. He would cast no more until he came to the dock.

The skiff moved on. At last, ten feet apart, a pair of stakes rose up gauntly out of the night. Barnacle-encrusted, they once had marked the approach from the main channel. The man guided the skiff between them, then put the paddle down softly. He stood up, reached for the net, tightened the noose around his wrist. From here he could drift down upon the dock. He could see it now, a ruined skeleton in the starshine.

Beyond it a mullet jumped and fell back with a flat, liquid sound. The man raised the edge of the net, put it between his teeth. He would not cast at a single swirl, he decided; he would wait until he saw two or three close together. The skiff was barely moving. He felt his muscles tense themselves, awaiting the signal from the brain.

Behind him in the channel he heard the porpoise blow again, nearer now. He frowned in the darkness. If the porpoise chose to fish this area, the mullet would scatter and vanish. There was no time to lose.

A school of sardines surfaced suddenly, skittering along like drops of mercury. Something, perhaps the shadow of the skiff, had frightened them. The old dock loomed very close. A mullet broke water just too far away; then another, nearer. The man marked the spreading ripples and decided to wait no longer.

He swung back the net, heavier now that it was wet. He had to turn his head, but out of the corner of his eye he saw two swirls in the black water just off the starboard bow. They were about eight feet apart, and they had the sluggish, oily look that marks the presence of something big just below the surface.

His conscious mind had no time to function, but instinct told him that the net was wide enough to cover both swirls if he could alter the direction of his cast. He could not halt the swing, but he shifted his feet slightly and made the cast off balance. He saw the net shoot forward, flare into an oval, and drop just where he wanted it.

Then the sea exploded in his face.

In a frenzy of spray, a great horned thing shot like a huge bat out of the water. The man saw the mesh of his net etched against the mottled blackness of its body and he knew, in the split second in which thought was still possible, that those twin swirls had been made, not by two mullet, but by the wing-tips

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of the giant ray of the Gulf Coast, *manta birostris*, also known as clam cracker, devil ray, sea devil.

The man gave a hoarse cry. He tried to claw the slip-knot off his wrist, but there was no time. The quarter-inch line snapped taut. He shot over the side of the skiff as if he had roped a runaway locomotive.

He hit the water head first and seemed to bounce once. He ploughed a blinding furrow for perhaps ten yards. Then the line went slack as the sea devil jumped again.

It was not the full-grown *manta* of the deep Gulf, but it was close to nine feet from tip to tip and it weighed over a thousand pounds.

Up into the air it went, pearl-coloured underbelly gleaming as it twisted in a frantic effort to dislodge the clinging thing that had fallen upon it. Up into the starlight, a monstrous survival from the dawn of time.

The water was less than four feet deep, Sobbing and choking, the man struggled for a foothold on the slimy bottom. Sucking in great gulps of air, he fought to free himself from the rope. But the slip-knot was jammed deep into his wrist; he might as well have tried to loosen a circle of steel.

The ray came down with a thunderous splash and drove forward again. The flexible net followed every movement, impeding it hardly at all. The man weighed twelve and a half stone, and he was braced for the shock, and he had the desperate strength that comes from looking into the blank eyes of death.

It was useless. His arm straightened out with a jerk that seemed to dislocate his shoulder; his feet shot out from under him; his head went under again.

Now at last he knew how the fish must feel when the line tightens and drags him towards the alien element that is his doom. Now he knew.

Desperately he dug the fingers of his free hand into the ooze, felt them dredge a futile channel through broken shells and the ribbon-like sea grasses. He tried to raise his head, but could not get it clear. Torrents of spray choked him as the ray plunged towards deep water.

His eyes were of no use to him in the foam-streaked blackness. He closed them tight, and at once an insane sequence of pictures flashed through his mind.

He saw his wife sitting in their living-room, reading, waiting calmly for his return. He saw the mullet he had just caught, gasping its life away on the floor boards of the skiff. He saw the cigarette he had flung from the sea-wall touch the water and expire with a tiny hiss.

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He saw all these things and many others simultaneously in his mind as his body fought silently and tenaciously for its existence. His hand touched something hard and closed on it in a death grip, but it was only the sharp-edged helmet of a horseshoe crab, and after an instant he let it go.

He had been under water perhaps fifteen seconds now, and something in his brain told him quite calmly that he could last another forty or fifty and then the red flashes behind his eyes would merge into darkness, and the water would pour into his lungs in one sharp painful shock, and he would be finished.

This thought spurred him to a desperate effort. He reached up and caught his pinioned wrist with his free hand. He doubled up his knees to create more drag. He thrashed his body madly, like a fighting fish, from side to side.

This did not disturb the ray, but now one of the great wings tore through the mesh, and the net slipped lower over the fins projecting like horns from below the nightmare head, and the sea devil jumped again.

And once more the man was able to get his feet on the bottom and his head above water, and he saw ahead of him the pair of ancient stakes that marked the approach to the channel.

He knew that if he was dragged much beyond those stakes he would be in eight feet of water, and the ray would go down to hug the bottom as rays always do, and then no power on earth could save him. So in the moment of respite that was granted him, he flung himself towards them.

For a moment he thought his captor yielded a bit. Then the ray moved off again, but more slowly now, and for a few yards the man was able to keep his feet on the bottom. Twice he hurled himself back against the rope with all his strength, hoping that something would break.

But nothing broke. The mesh of the net was ripped and torn, but the draw-lines were strong, and the stout perimeter cord threaded through the sinkers was even stronger.

The man could feel nothing now in his trapped hand, it was numb ; but the ray could feel the powerful lunges of the unknown thing that was trying to restrain it. It drove its great wings against the unyielding water and forged ahead, dragging the man and pushing a sullen wave in front of it.

The man had swung as far as he could towards the stakes. He plunged towards one and missed it by inches. His feet slipped and he went down on his knees.

Then the ray swerved sharply and the second stake came right at him. He reached out with his free hand and caught it.

He caught it just above the surface, six or eight inches

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below high-water mark. He felt the razor-sharp barnacles bite into his hand, collapse under the pressure, drive their tiny slime-covered shell splinters deep into his flesh.

He felt the pain, and he welcomed it, and he made his fingers into an iron claw that would hold until the tendons were severed or the skin was shredded from the bone.

The ray felt the pressure increase with a jerk that stopped it dead in the water. For a moment all was still as the tremendous forces came into equilibrium.

Then the net slipped again, and the perimeter cord came down over the sea devil's eyes, blinding it momentarily. The great ray settled to the bottom and braced its wings against the mud and hurled itself forward and upwards.

The stake was only a four-by-four of creosoted pine, and it was old. Ten thousand tides had swirled around it. Worms had bored; parasites had clung. Under the crust of barnacles it still had some heart left, but not enough.

The man's grip was five feet above the floor of the bay; the leverage was too great. The stake snapped off at its base.

The ray lunged upwards, dragging the man and the useless timber. The man had his lungs full of air, but when the stake snapped he thought of expelling the air and inhaling the water so as to have it finished quickly.

He thought of this, but he did not do it. And then, just at the channel's edge, the ray met the porpoise, coming in.

The porpoise had fed well this night and was in no hurry, but it was a methodical creature and it intended to make a sweep around the old dock before the tide dropped too low.

It had no quarrel with any ray, but it feared no fish in the sea, and when the great black shadow came rushing blindly, unavoidably, the porpoise rolled fast and struck once with its massive horizontal tail.

The blow descended on the ray's flat body with a sound like a pistol shot. It would have broken a buffalo's back, and even the sea devil was half stunned.

It veered wildly and turned back towards shallow water. It passed within ten feet of the man, face down in the water. It slowed and almost stopped, wing-tips moving faintly, gathering strength for another rush.

The man had heard the tremendous slap of the great mammal's tail and the snorting gasp as it plunged away. He felt the line go slack again, and he raised his dripping face, and he reached for the bottom with his feet. He found it, but now the water was up to his neck.

He plucked at the noose once more with his lacerated hand,

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but there was no strength in his fingers. He felt the tension come back into the line as the ray began to move again, and for half a second he was tempted to throw himself backwards and fight as he had been doing, pitting his strength against the vastly superior strength of the brute.

But the acceptance of imminent death had done something to his brain. It had driven out the fear, and with the fear had gone the panic. He could think now, and he knew with absolute certainty that if he was to make any use of this last chance that had been given him, it would have to be based on the one faculty that had carried man to his pre-eminence above all beasts, the faculty of reason.

Only by using his brain could he possibly survive, and he called on his brain for a solution, and his brain responded.

He did not know whether his body still had the strength to carry out the brain's commands, but he began to swim forward, towards the ray that was still moving hesitantly away from the channel. He swam forward, feeling the rope go slack as he gained on the creature.

Ahead of him he saw the one remaining stake, and he made himself swim faster until he was parallel with the ray and the rope trailed behind both of them in a deep U. He swam with a surge of desperate energy that came from nowhere, so that he was slightly in the lead as they came to the stake. He passed on one side of it ; the ray was on the other.

Then the man took one last deep breath, and he went down under the black water until he was sitting on the bottom of the bay. He put one foot over the line so that it passed under his bent knee.

He drove both his heels into the mud, and he clutched the slimy grass with his bleeding hand, and he waited for the tension to come again.

The ray passed on the other side of the stake, moving faster now. The rope grew taut again, and it began to drag the man back towards the stake.

He held his prisoned wrist close to the bottom, under his knee, and he prayed that the stake would not break. He felt the rope vibrate as the barnacles bit into it. He did not know whether the rope would crush the barnacles, or whether the barnacles would cut the rope.

All he knew was that in five seconds or less he would be dragged into the stake and cut to ribbons if he tried to hold on ; or drowned if he didn't.

He felt himself sliding slowly, and then faster, and suddenly

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the ray made a great leap forward, and the rope burned around the base of the stake, and the man's foot hit it hard.

He kicked himself backwards with his remaining strength, and the rope parted, and he was free.

He came slowly to the surface. Thirty feet away the sea devil made one tremendous leap and disappeared into the darkness.

The man raised his wrist and looked at the frayed length of rope dangling from it. Twenty inches, perhaps. He lifted his other hand and felt the hot blood start instantly, but he didn't care. He put this hand on the stake above the barnacles and held on to the good, rough, honest wood. He heard a strange noise, and realized that it was himself sobbing.

High above, there was a droning sound, and looking up he saw the nightly plane from New Orleans in-bound for Tampa. Calm and serene, it sailed, symbol of man's proud mastery over nature. Its lights winked red and green; then it was gone.

Slowly, painfully, the man began to move through the placid water. He came to the skiff at last and climbed into it.

The mullet, still alive, slapped convulsively with its tail. The man reached down with his torn hand, picked up the mullet, let it go. He began to work on the slip-knot doggedly, with his teeth. His mind was almost a blank, but not quite.

He knew one thing. He knew he would do no more casting alone at night. Not in the dark of the moon. No, not he.

NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

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DANCING DAYS

Come and trip it as ye go
On the light fantastic toe

JOHN MILTON.

No sooner are the prince and his mother seated upon their thrones than to music of tinkling delicacy, of Papageno plumage, there appears the Fée Dragée. The door of a crystal cage has been opened for her, or so it would seem, and she comes out like a figure that dances before the clock, at the striking of the hour.

Stealing in softly, and always on her points, she comes to the front of the stage with a run of little steps, a clocking, clocking of her ballet shoes. It is the blunted toes of these that make this hammering and that raise her into her element of air; and, at once, the glockenspiel, the glissando or little tower of bells, begins. She is the Fée Dragée or sugarplum: sugar almond and smooth sultana of my fancy.

SACHEVERELL SITWELL,
Dance of the Quick and the Dead

Valse des Fleurs

Now is the hour when, swinging in the breeze,
Each flower, like a censer, sheds its sweet.
The air is full of scents and melodies,
O languorous waltz! O swoon of dancing feet!

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE, *Harmonie du soir,*
translated by LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS

Two-step

Look at the spirit he gets into a dreary commonplace waltz; how effete the other dancers seem, beside him. He is youth and vigour and courage, he is strength and gaiety and—*Ow!* Get off my instep, you hulking peasant! What do you think I am, anyway—a gangplank? *Ow!*

No, of course it didn't hurt. Why, it didn't a bit. Honestly. And it was all my fault. You see, that little step of yours—well it's perfectly lovely, but it's just a tiny bit tricky to follow at first. Oh, did you work it up yourself? You really did? Well, aren't you amazing! Oh, now I think I've got it . . .

Two stumbles, slip, and a twenty-yard dash; yes. I've got it. I've got several other things, too, including a split shin and a bitter heart. I hate this creature I'm chained to. I hated him

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the moment I saw his leering, bestial face. And here I've been locked in his noxious embrace for the thirty-five years this waltz has lasted . . .

Oh, they're going to play another encore. Oh, goody. Oh, that's lovely. Tired? I should say I'm not tired. I'd like to go on like this forever.

I should say I'm not tired. I'm dead, that's all I am. Dead, and in what a cause! And the music is never going to stop playing, and we're going on like this, Double-Time Charlie and I, throughout eternity.

DOROTHY PARKER, *The Waltz*

Pas Seul

When you dance, remember the dancing shape
Which was yours when you first
Stirred your limbs in the dance:
So the shape of a bloom encircles the burst
Of each bud, as it hurls out its petals
Like shrapnel to touch the ultimate bound—
Till the parabola falters and breaks . . .
The spent blossom falls to the ground . . .

GILBERT PHELPS, *The Dancer*

Unfortunate Attachment

During the dance, in the whirl of the "Poussette," a hook in the breast of his regimental Coat caught in my lace Tucker, and we were thus hooked together in the most awkward manner. Fergus Langley, one of the Stewards, uttered the word "ominous" in my ear whilst I was trying to disengage myself. I tore the lace recklessly, and was too much confused to look up.

ELIZABETH HAM, 1783–1820

Rose Dance

Round and round, like a dance of snow
In a dazzling drift, as its guardians, go
Floating the women faded for ages,
Sculptured in stone, on the poet's pages.
Then follow women fresh and gay,
Living and loving and loved to-day,
Last, in the rear, flee the multitude of maidens,
Beauties unborn. And all, to one cadence,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

ROBERT BROWNING, *Women and Roses*

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At the Ball

Lady Something, behind a large sheaf of mauve malamaisons, was growing stiff. Already, for the most part, the guests were welcomed, and it was only the Archduchess now, who as usual was late, that kept their Excellencies lingering at the head of the stairs. Her Majesty Queen Thleeanouhee of the Land of Dates had just arrived, but seemed loath to leave the stairs, while her hostess, whom she addressed affectionately as her *dear gazelle*, remained upon them—"Let us go away by and by, my dear gazelle," she exclaimed with a primitive smile, "and remove our corsets and talk."

"Unhappily Pisuerga is not the East, ma'am!" Lady Something replied.

"Never mind, my dear; we will introduce this innovation . . ."

But the arrival of the Archduchess Elizabeth spared the Ambassadress from what might too easily have become an "incident."

In the beautiful chandeliered apartments several young couples were pirouetting to the inevitable waltz from the Blue Banana.

RONALD FIRBANK, *The Flower Beneath the Foot*

Pavane

Lo, how finely the Graces can it foot
To the instrument;
They dancen deftly, and singen soote,
In their merriment,
Wants not a fourth Grace, to make the dance even?
Let that room to my lady be yeven:
She shall be a Grace,
To fill the fourth place,
And reign with the rest in heaven.

EDMUND SPENSER, *The Shepheardes Calender*, 1579

Far from Sober

Our diversion was dancing, without a violin or any music, singing of foolish healths, and drinking as fast as it could be well poured down . . . About three o'clock, finding myself to have about as much liquor as would do me good, I slipt away unobserved, leaving my wife. Though I was very far from sober, I came home, thank God, very safe and well, without even tumbling; and Mr. French's servant brought my wife home at ten minutes past five.

THOMAS TURNER, 22*nd February*, 1757

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★ *Lin Yutang writes of this story by Chen Hsuanyu, a Chinese writer of the eighth century* A.D., *which he here translates, that it perfectly blends the elements of love and the supernatural: "One does not question that these things happened. They simply did."*

WINGS OF LOVE

by LIN YUTANG

WANG CHOU, a young boy of seventeen, had lost his father and was now alone. Steady and more mature than his age indicates, he was old enough to shift for himself.

His father had told him on his death-bed that he should go to live with his aunt, who was living in the south at Hengchow, and had reminded him that he was betrothed to his cousin. This was a promise between his father and the father's sister when the babies were being expected; they had said that in case one was a boy and the other a girl, they would be betrothed to each other.

Wang Chou disposed of the house and set out to the south accordingly. The young boy's mind was enlivened by the hope of seeing a girl cousin whom he had not seen since the age of six, when his father received an appointment in the north. He wondered how she had grown and whether she was still the fragile, affectionate child who used to cling to him as a play companion and wonder at all his doings.

He had better hurry, Wang Chou thought, for a girl of seventeen might be betrothed to someone else if he did not show up. But the voyage was slow, and it took him a full month to come down the Hsiang River and then the Tungting Lake and finally reach the mountain city of Hengchow.

His uncle, Chang Yi, ran a shop dealing in herbs and medicinal products. He was a broad-jowled, heavy-voiced man. Every day for the past twenty-five years, he had gone to the shop as regularly as a clock, and he had never travelled or taken a holiday. Cautious, thrifty, and conservative, he had slowly built up his business until he was now quite well-to-do. He had expanded his shop to do wholesale business, added to his property, and built a new house.

When Wang Chou saw him at the shop, the uncle growled, "What do you come here for?"

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Wang Chou told him. He knew his uncle was a simple and timid man at heart, who wanted only to pay his taxes and have the good opinion of his neighbours. Sober and unimaginative, he had never relaxed from his stern appearance as an elder, having enough trouble keeping himself in the straight and narrow path.

He was taken to the uncle's new house, and announced himself as a relative from Taiyuan. The aunt was away at the moment.

Soon he saw a young girl in a blue dress come into the parlour. Chienniang had grown up into a beautiful girl with a very slender figure; she wore a braid of black hair over her shoulder. Her silken smooth face flushed at the sight of her cousin.

After a moment's hesitation, she let out a small scream and cried, "You are brother Chou!"

"You are sister Chien!"

The girl was so excited that her eyes filled with tears. "How you have grown!" cried the young girl, eyeing her handsome cousin.

"And so have you!" exclaimed Wang Chou.

Wang Chou looked at the girl with unconcealed admiration, especially with his father's dying words in mind. Soon they were lost in a busy exchange of news of the families and random recollections of their childhood. She had a younger brother several years her junior, who was greatly surprised to see a total stranger who called himself his cousin. They had been separated so long that the family hardly ever spoke of him.

When the mother came back she gave a warm welcome to this son of her deceased brother. She was a woman with clear-cut features, a very delicate complexion, and greying hair. A shy, sensitive woman, her lips constantly quivered when she smiled.

He informed her that he had finished the district school, and did not know what he was going to do next, and she informed him in turn that his uncle's business was doing well.

"I can see that. You are living in such a beautiful house," said the nephew.

"Your uncle is a very funny man. It took a long time of persuasion on my part and that of the children to get him to move into the new house after he had built it. He is even now regretting the money he is losing by not renting it out. You stay with us. I shall ask your uncle to give you a job at the shop. Do your part and don't be afraid of his great voice."

The uncle never came home until evening, and when he did, he was as gruff and as uncommunicative as he had been that morning. The death of his brother-in-law did not seem to

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concern him, and Wang Chou felt very like a poor relative and an orphaned young man to be put to the test of apprenticeship.

But the aunt was kind and a gentle creature. She was much better educated than her husband and seemed to look upon her husband's business-like and authoritative attitude with light amusement, although she always obeyed his wishes. She had seen to it, too, that Chienniang received a perfect education, through private tutoring.

There was just nothing to talk about at dinner, because the mother and daughter did not understand business, and the father was not much interested in anything else. With his stern appearance and his naturally loud voice, he had established himself as the head of the family.

In time, the nephew settled down as a permanent member of the family. Nothing was said about the promised betrothal which was, of course, verbal between the aunt and her brother when both the babies were expected. To Wang Chou, the girl in the blue dress would be his choice even if there had been no such promise. Chienniang found Wang Chou's quiet and reserved disposition very much to her liking, too, and as they were thrown into each other's company, before long she had given her heart completely to him.

The mother saw the new happiness on Chienniang's face. When Chienniang cooked something special for the family, she felt as if she was cooking for Wang Chou alone, and a new happiness and pride welled up in her heart. Step by step, she forgot her youthful bashfulness and took over the mending of his clothing and looking after his laundry; she assumed a sort of prior right to take care of him.

There was no definite division of jobs, for the daughter was being trained to look after the general household although they had several maids, but the business of cleaning his room and looking after his comforts fell naturally to her. Chienniang would not permit even her younger brother to upset things in his room.

The mother knew that she loved him. One day she said to her daughter dryly, "Chienniang, I see that our dishes are getting more and more salty these days."

Chienniang blushed, for Wang Chou had several times complained that the dishes were not salty enough.

Wang Chou had never dreamt that life could be so sweet and beautiful. He did not mind putting up with his gruff uncle at the shop; he would do anything for the sake of Chienniang and to be near her. Loving Chienniang, he loved all that was connected with her.

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He felt towards his aunt as if she were his own mother and played with the little boy as if he were his own brother. The father seldom talked at dinner or indulged in jokes with the family, but he was away all day, and was often invited out to business dinners in the evenings.

The Hengchow climate was changeful, varying to extremes between sudden storms coming over the mountains and a scorching heat when the sun was out. Once Wang Chou fell sick and found it so comfortable to lie in bed all day at home, served by his cousin, that he stayed in bed longer than was necessary.

"Now you must go to the shop, or my father will be angry," Chienniang said to him.

"Must I?" asked Wang Chou reluctantly.

One day Chienniang said to him, "You must put more clothing on. I think it is going to rain. If you get sick again, I shall be angry with you."

"I should love to," replied Wang Chou impishly, and she understood what he meant.

"Don't be silly," said Chienniang, pouting her lips, and she made him put on extra clothing.

One day Chienniang's elder aunt, the wife of her father's brother, arrived from Changan for a visit. The brother was an extremely wealthy man. He had helped Chang Yi, the girl's father, found the shop with his money; their property was not yet divided and Chang Yi still retained that devotion to his brother which amounted to fear and servile respect for the head of the family.

The aunt was royally treated. Family devotion and Chang Yi's timid nature and natural respect for wealth could both account for his attitude towards this elder aunt. The best dinners were served every day, and Chang Yi talked and joked at dinner and tried to make himself pleasant to the elder aunt in a way that he had not talked and joked with his wife.

The elder aunt found nothing more pleasant and agreeable than to arrange a match with a rich family for her niece. One day, returning from a party with the wealthiest family of the town, the Tsiangs, she said to the girl's mother, in the girl's hearing, "Chienniang is a sweet girl and she is eighteen. I am arranging a match for her with the second son of the Tsiangs. You know, of course, who the Tsiangs are, and I mean *the* Tsiangs."

"My dear sister-in-law, I have betrothed Chienniang to my brother's son," replied the mother.

"You mean that nephew staying with you? But your brother is already dead."

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" That does not make any difference. They seem wonderfully suited to each other."

Chienniang, hearing her mother taking the nephew's side, blushed. The elder aunt broke into loud laughter. " You are crazy! What has he got? I am talking about a respectable match with a decent family with some social standing like ourselves."

Chienniang rose from her seat, left the room, and slammed the door.

" What an ungrateful girl! " the elder aunt shouted after her. " She does not realise what I am doing for her. You have never seen their garden home. Don't be a weak mother. You will thank me when you see the inside of their house. Why, their mistress wears a diamond ring almost as big as mine! "

The mother did not reply, and excused herself. But the elder aunt, having thought of this match as her best recreation during her stay, would not give up. An engagement would mean dinners and parties, her holiday would be filled with social activities, and she would be happy to have accomplished something memorable during her short stay.

But if the mother resisted her suggestion, the elder aunt found in the father of the girl a ready, appreciative and delighted listener. Chang Yi could not conceive of anything more gratifying to his social ambition and purpose in life. He had always envied one family in the city and that was the Tsiangs. They were an ancient family and old Mr. Tsiang had been an official in the capital. He had wanted to move in the circle of the Tsiangs and had not once been invited by them.

The result was that Chienniang's betrothal to the second son of the Tsiang family was celebrated over the protest of the mother, while the girl lay in bed on a hunger-strike.

" No good will come of this," said the mother to her husband. " It is against the girl's wish. You should have gone in and seen the girl crying her heart out in bed. It is her life we have to consider. You have fallen for the Tsiang money."

In time Chienniang was persuaded to eat and get up from bed. She went about the house like one condemned.

The young lover did not care what happened now. He took leave and disappeared for three weeks, trying to drown his sorrow in the Heng mountains. After three weeks, he could not resist the idea of coming back to see his love. When he came back, he found Chienniang suffering from a curious, unknown disease.

The day after his departure, the girl lost her memory and did not know who she was. She lay in bed and refused to get up. She did not recognize her own mother and father or her maid.

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She mumbled words which they did not understand. They feared she had gone out of her mind.

But there was something worse. She had no fever, no pains, but she lay in bed all day without food, without drink. They tried to talk to her but her eyes were blank. It was as if her soul had departed from her body, and the body, without the master, stopped functioning altogether. A white pallor settled over her face and the doctors confessed that they had never seen a case like this, and did not know what it was.

With the mother's permission, Wang Chou rushed in to see her. "Chienniang, Chienniang!" he called.

The mother watched anxiously. The girl's blank eyes seemed to focus again, her eyelashes moved, and a tinge of red returned to her cheeks.

"Chienniang, Chienniang!" he called again.

Her lips moved and parted in a glad, sure smile.

"It's you," she said quietly.

Tears filled the mother's eyes. "Chienniang, your spirit has returned. You know your mother, don't you?"

"Of course, Mother. What's the matter? What are you crying about? Why am I lying in bed?"

The girl apparently did not know all that had happened. When her mother told her that she had been lying in bed and had not recognized her own mother she could not believe it.

The girl became strong again in a few days. When she was sick, her father had been really frightened, but seeing that she had recovered, he settled back into his authoritative manner again.

When the mother described how colour returned to Chienniang's cheeks—which she had seen personally—when the nephew came to the girl's bedside, he said, "A fake! The doctors have never seen such a disease. Not knowing her own parents! I do not believe it."

"My dear husband, you have seen the girl lying in bed without food and drink for days. It is in her heart. You should reconsider the engagement——"

"The ceremony is over. Besides, you don't mean that I should break the engagement with the Tsiang family? They will not believe the story. I don't believe it myself."

The aunt who was still staying with them was heard to make sarcastic remarks, implying that the girl's sickness was feigned. "I have lived for fifty years and have never heard of a person not knowing her father and mother."

The father refused to reopen the question. The lovers were miserable and saw no way out. Wang Chou found the situation intolerable. There was nothing he could do. Chagrined and in

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despair, he informed his uncle that he was leaving for the capital, to be on his own.

"Maybe that is a good idea," replied the uncle curtly.

The night before his departure, the family gave him a farewell dinner. But Chienniang was heart-broken. She had been lying in bed for two days and refused to get up.

Wang Chou had the mother's permission to go into the girl's room and say good-bye. She had not eaten for two days and she was really ill with a high fever. Touching her gently, he said, "I am leaving and have come to say good-bye. There is nothing we can do."

"I shall die, brother Chou. I have no desire to live when you are gone. But I only know this—living or dead, my spirit will always be with you wherever you are."

Wang Chou could find no words to comfort her. They parted in tears, and the young man started on his way with an open wound in his heart, believing he would never come back to the house.

His boat had gone about a mile. It was near supper-time, and the boat was anchored for the night. Wang Chou lay in bed, sad and lonely, and shedding futile tears. Towards midnight, he heard footsteps drawing nearer and nearer on the bank.

"Brother Chou," he heard a girl whisper. He thought he was dreaming, for he knew she was ill in bed. He peeped out over the gunwale and saw Chienniang standing on the bank. In utter amazement, he jumped ashore.

"I have run away from home," said the girl weakly and fell into his arms.

He carried her into the boat quickly, unable to understand how she could cover that distance in her condition except by a superhuman will power, and then he discovered she had come barefooted. How they cried together for joy!

Lying close to his body, caressed with kisses and restored by the warmth, she soon recovered. "Nothing can stop me from following you," she said to him, when she opened her eyes again. It was as if she had completely recovered, and now that they were together and sure of each other, nothing mattered.

It was a long voyage, and during the whole trip, Chienniang expressed only one regret; she felt very sorry for her mother who would be heart-broken when she found that her daughter had disappeared.

They finally arrived at a town in distant Szechuen, where Wang Chou found a small job with a salary barely large enough to support them. In order to make both ends meet, he rented a

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room in a farmhouse about a mile from the city, a distance which he had to cover on foot daily to and from his office.

But he was unbelievably happy. Chienniang washed and cooked and she was contented and happy with him. He looked at his small room, furnished with rustic chairs, a table, and a simple bed, and said that he had all he wanted in life. The farmer who let him have a room upstairs was a simple man and his wife was kind to them. They offered them vegetables from their garden, which helped them to save money for food, and they in turn offered to help in the garden.

Then winter came and Chienniang gave birth to a baby boy, sweet and plump. When spring came, Wang Chou would return to find his wife holding the fat baby in her arms, breast-feeding him. His cup of happiness was full.

He never apologized to his wife for making her live like a poor man's wife, for he knew he did not have to. Nevertheless, he knew she was used to more comfortable living, and was surprised that she had adapted herself to the circumstances so well.

"I wish I could earn more money and have a maid for you."

His wife stopped him with a soft pressure on his cheeks. It was a complete answer. "You didn't ask me to come. I ran away to follow you," she said simply.

Then they went through that delightful period when every week revealed something new and amazing in their child. The baby was adorable. Now he could grab what he wanted; now he could point to his nose and grab his ear and twitch it. Then the baby learnt to crawl and to smack his lips, and to say "mamma" and demonstrate those daily miracles of growing intelligence.

He was an endless joy who filled their lives. The farmer couple, who were without children, loved the baby and helped Chienniang take care of him.

There was only one thing which marred their happiness. Chienniang kept thinking of her mother and little brother, though she cared not much for her father. Wang Chou was so much in love with her that he could sense her thoughts.

"You are thinking of your mother, I know. If you wish, I shall take you home. We are married now and have a baby, and there's nothing they can do about it. At least, it will make your mother happy to see you again."

Chienniang wept with gratitude for his kindness and solicitude for her happiness.

"Let us do it. My mother must have gone crazy thinking that I am lost. And I have this beautiful grandchild to present to my parents."

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They started out on the voyage again. After a month on the boat, they arrived at Hengchow.

" You go up first and prepare my parents to receive me," said Chienniang. Taking a gold hair brooch, she gave it to him and said, " Bring this as a token, in case they are still angry and deny you entrance or refuse to believe your story."

The boat dropped anchor on the sandy bank. With Chienniang waiting in the boat, Wang Chou trudged the short distance to her home.

It was about supper-time and the father was at home. Wang Chou knelt on the ground and implored his forgiveness for running away with his daughter. The mother was there and seemed glad to see him, though she looked older, and her hair had turned completely white. He told them that they had now returned and their daughter was waiting in a boat.

" What are you talking about ? " replied the father. " Forgive you for what ? My daughter has been ill in bed for this entire year."

" Chienniang has never been able to leave her bed since you were gone," said the mother. " It has been sad this long year. She was so ill that at times she went without food for weeks. I could never forgive myself. I promised her that I would break off the engagement, but she was so weak she didn't seem to hear me, as if her spirit had already departed from her body. I was daily hoping for your return."

" I assure you that Chienniang is well and in the boat at this moment. Look, here is her token."

He presented the gold hair brooch. The mother examined it closely and recognized it. The family was greatly confused.

" I tell you she is in the boat. Send a servant to come along with me and see."

The parents were puzzled, but a servant was sent to go with Wang Chou and a sedan chair was ordered. The servant came to the boat and recognized the girl who looked exactly like Chienniang.

" Are my parents well ? " the girl asked.

" They are well," replied the servant.

While the family was thus held in suspense and confusion, waiting for the return of the servant, a maid had taken the hair brooch and gone in to see the sick daughter. When the latter heard that Wang Chou had returned, her eyes opened and she smiled.

She saw the hair brooch and said, " Indeed I have lost it," and put the brooch in her hair.

Without the maid noticing, the girl got up from her bed, walked

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out of the house silently like a somnambulist, and went straight towards the bank, with a smiling face.

Chienniang was leaving the boat already. Wang Chou was holding the baby, waiting for her to get into the sedan chair. He saw the girl on the bank come steadily nearer, and when the two girls met, they merged into one body and Chienniang's dress became double.

The family was greatly excited when the maid reported that the sick daughter in bed had disappeared. When they saw Chienniang step out of the sedan chair, healthy and well and holding a plump baby in her arms, they were not more delighted than they were astonished and bewildered.

They understood then that the girl's spirit, her real self, had gone to live with him. For love had wings which broke prison bars. What they had seen in the sick daughter lying in bed was no more than an empty shadow left behind, a body without a soul, from which the conscious spirit had wandered away.

The incident happened in the year A.D. 692. The family kept the story of this strange happening a secret from their neighbours. In time, Chienniang gave birth to several other children, and Wang Chou and Chienniang lived to a happy old age, loving each other more the older they grew.

* * *

NOW

The longed-for summer goes ;
Dwindles away
To its last rose,
Its narrowest day.

No heaven-sweet air but must die ;
Softlier float,
Breathe lingeringly
Its final note.

Oh, what dull truths to tell !
Now *is the all-sufficing all*
Wherein to love the lovely well,
Whate'er befall.

WALTER DE LA MARE

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FINGER OF FATE

The green depths of the jungle seemed to wait in a hush of expectancy

by NINA WARNER HOOKE

THE Whitworths had gone. The roar of their retreating entourage was already swallowed in the heavy silence of the Malayan night.

"It's come to something when one's guests turn up in an armoured car with an escort of Ghurkas," George Hollis grunted.

"Presumably it's not done merely for dramatic effect," I remarked.

"Oh, definitely not. Order from Admin."

The reason was plain. The plantation was an outlying one and its estate road ran through lonely and dangerous country in which a guerilla band was known to be operating. A month earlier there had been an ambush less than half a mile from the bungalow and two Special Constables detailed to the estate had been killed. George himself had been lucky to escape with no greater damage than a piece nicked out of his leg by a sniper's bullet.

George Hollis and I had been at Rugby together, and when he heard that I had arrived in the colony on a roving commission to write a series of articles on the general situation, he at once offered to put me up and, in his own words, show me around.

Most of the Admin. stuff, covering the close liaison between army and police forces in bandit-fighting, I had obtained from the Director of Ops. in Kuala Lumpur. But through George I learned what it really means to run a rubber plantation under front-line conditions, when every patch of jungle may conceal a lurking killer and when every tour of inspection must be made with unceasing vigilance and rifle at the ready.

He, and others like him, though they would have been the last to think of themselves as heroes and were in their matter-of-fact way simply trying to get on with the job, had already earned my heartfelt admiration.

It was my third day on the station and George had asked the Whitworths to dinner and bridge. They were, in fact, his nearest neighbours, but his reason for inviting them on this occasion was, he said, because they were interesting people and might provide me with some useful copy.

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On form, he could scarcely have made a better choice. Jeff Whitworth was the District Officer, and like George, he had spent twenty years in the country, apart from a short interlude in the Services. His wife had been the Resident's daughter under the old régime. They were a nice-looking couple, typically British in their cool pleasant way, and though they were now in their forties, both had kept their fair hair and their trim athletic figures. They were so much alike that you might have taken them for brother and sister.

Towards each other they were friendly but undemonstrative. Nothing seemed to ruffle them—not even the discovery of a poisonous snake under the card table. Jeff had deftly dispatched it with a golf-club. I could imagine him dealing with a captured bandit with the same ruthless efficiency.

As a source of sensational copy, however, he was a disappointment. Perhaps he had that innate distrust of the press which is not uncommon in men of action, and was merely being hypercautious. At any rate, I had seldom met anyone so hard to draw on his own ground.

Of his difficult and often highly dangerous work he said barely a word, dismissing it as mere line-of-duty stuff. The simile that sprang to my mind was that it was like trying to tap rubber from a tree with a cast-iron bark. I gave up after a while and fixed my mind on the bridge game.

The evening, however, was not unproductive. A writer has a lot in common with a prospector, in that his search for material is like the hunt for precious metals. After digging in vain in likely ground, he may stumble on a rich seam in an unexpected quarter. I got a story, though it was not one I could use in my current assignment. I got it from George, long after the Whitworths had gone home.

We had stretched ourselves on cane chairs on the verandah for a last smoke before turning in. The night was brilliant with moonlight. It was not unbearably hot, and it was far from quiet.

From the jungle across the sluggish river below us came a succession of queer nocturnal noises—grunts and scuffles and the strident cries of night-birds. Booming away like a bass-clef accompaniment sounded the monotonous croaking of bullfrogs. It seemed a far cry from Fleet Street.

"Nice game," remarked George, out of the shadows beside me.

"Very," I agreed. "They play well."

"Do everything well, Jeff particularly. He's an extraordinary fellow. Double blue, used to win all the tennis tournaments in the old days and was the best shot in the F.M.S. What did you think of him?"

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I puffed at my cheroot and made some non-committal reply. But George repeated his query.

" I'd be interested to hear your opinion. All you writers are psychologists, in a sense."

Thus pressed, I gave my mind to the thing.

" It's hard to be quite explicit. I liked him, of course. There's nothing about him to *dislike*. But he's too much the cold-fish British official for my taste. A splendid chap, but not quite human."

" Go on," said George.

I went on, warming to my task. " It's impossible to imagine him giving rein to any stronger emotion than mild excitement at a rugger match. I doubt if he has ever been in love—even with his wife. He would never do anything that wasn't according to the rules. He is a monument of decorum, and that goes for her, too.

" Summing up, I should say the Whitworths are not of the gloriously unhappy few who scale the heights of love and pain. Am I right ? "

" No," said George. " You are completely wrong."

I scented a story, and by and by I got it.

It was very late before we finally turned in. The moon had dropped into the jungle across the river, and we had consumed a good many whiskies, before I had heard that strange closed chapter in the life of Jeff Whitworth. I could see, as clearly as though I had known her personally, the lovely woman who had driven him to the sin beyond redemption.

Soolong was a flourishing place twenty years ago. The club was one of the gayest in the F.M.S., and Lacey Powell was a popular Resident. His daughter Joyce had come straight out to him on leaving school. Her prettiness was of the enduring English kind and she looked much the same then as now. People liked her, but the men found her unapproachable and cold.

The truth was, simply, that she was very young and romantic. She was always unconsciously searching for the noble and handsome hero of her dreams, and until she found him she was content to wait.

It was inevitable that when Jeff Whitworth came on the scene, she should decide she had found her ideal. There was no one in the colony to touch him for looks or athletic prowess. He was manly, yet at the same time charmingly boyish.

The moment she saw him she knew, like the maiden in the fairy tale, that she had found her prince. Her subsequent behaviour, as I see it, was due to her inability to see Jeff in any other role.

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In fact, she threw herself at him. If we had affectionately laughed at the poor child before for her excessive modesty, she now made herself really ridiculous by going to the other extreme. She waylaid Jeff each evening on his way from the office to the club. She refused to dance or to play in tennis doubles with anyone else. She pestered her father into recommending him for promotion before it was officially due, in order, she said, that they might become engaged the sooner.

Now, all this was rather frightening to a youngster of Jeff's disposition. An older man would have known how to deal with it. A foreigner would have turned it gracefully to his own advantage and risked nothing in the process. But then, had Jeff been other than he was, the situation would never have arisen.

It was also extremely bad strategy. Poor Joyce knew nothing of feminine wiles, or finesse. She knew nothing whatever about men, and, it is to be feared, very little at all about life. At nineteen one tends to be like that, especially if one has so far lived in a kind of private fairyland.

Outside Jeff's working hours, the two were always together. This was largely because Jeff had no option. Joyce would arrange early-morning rides, bathing parties, moonlight excursions. She monopolized him completely.

In fairness, it must be admitted that he was a willing victim. He would have been less than human if he had not been flattered by these attentions. It was only when he stopped to think that he became uneasy. But he was not given much time for thought.

His natural courtesy prevented him from refusing Joyce's invitations; though, indeed, in those early days, it is doubtful if he had any wish to do so. After all, she was an attractive girl with sufficient intelligence to make her a charming companion. There were several men in the colony who, while they affected to sympathize with him, secretly envied Jeff Whitworth.

It must have been Joyce herself who originated the rumour that they were engaged. When it came to Jeff's ears he was startled, but he made no attempt to refute it publicly. His code of honour prohibited him from any course of action that would bring humiliation on a woman.

He must have realized that he had been somewhat weak and foolish, but he was prepared to take the consequences, and there is little doubt that in the normal course of events he would have proposed to her at once. After all, he liked her tremendously. Her obvious devotion embarrassed him at times, but they were excellent friends.

He would probably, after marrying her, have fallen shyly in love. They might have been very happy. He had no emotional

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ties and no wish to contract any, for he was a serious young man and too keen on his job to fool around with the many women who were attracted by him and made no secret of the fact.

He had also a good deal to gain by the alliance, so far as his prospects were concerned. He was already a favourite with officialdom and the Sultan, and marriage with the Resident's daughter would further consolidate his position. It was characteristic of him that this should be the only important factor against it, and cause him deep thought before he finally came to his decision.

Wedlock, decided this earnest young man, is an institution that depends for its success on friendship, respect, and mutual understanding. Witness the success of many a *mariage de convenance.*

He was astute enough to know that two opinions are better than one, and had a long talk with George Hollis, propounding his decision and every argument in justification of it. George backed him up, although he privately thought the material advantages weighed more heavily with the boy than they really did.

It was for this reason that he omitted to point out the obvious flaw : the friendship-and-understanding business, considered as a basis for marriage, is all right only if it is unhampered on either side by other feelings. The point that got overlooked in Jeff's neat and logical exposition was that Joyce was wildly in love with him.

Useless to belittle that delirium by classing it as a schoolgirl's passion for the first good-looking young man with whom she had come in contact. It went deeper than that. Joyce had no mother, and her father had been so long abroad that he was almost a stranger. On Jeff, therefore, convinced that he was predestined to be her mate and lover, she lavished the stored-up affection of a hungry and romantic heart.

On the morning after his talk with George Hollis, Jeff went into Penang to buy a ring. He did not tell Joyce the real reason for the trip. Said it was official business. He had got it into his head that he wanted to surprise her.

To this end he had bribed the amah at the Residency to steal from Joyce's dressing-table the signet-ring she often wore on the third finger of her right hand, so that he could be sure of getting the measurement correct. She was to make out that it was lost, and then conveniently find it again a few days later.

Having mapped out everything—including his entire future—with the thoroughness characteristic of him, Jeff departed, feeling satisfied, resigned, and perhaps even vaguely excited.

On arrival in Penang he looked up an old friend of his father's,

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a Dutch importer, and arranged to stay the night with him. He then set out for the jeweller's.

After careful deliberation he chose a fine square-cut sapphire mounted in platinum. It cost him a good deal of money, but he did not grudge it. He would have scorned to offer anything but the best he could afford.

Strolling back along the blistering palm-fringed streets he went over his plans again. There was to be a club dance the next day. He would take Joyce out on the back verandah. No, into the garden. He had never so much as kissed her yet. At least, not properly, not on the mouth. He wondered why he had not done so. She had a pretty mouth, with small, even, white teeth.

He had no qualms. With Jeff, a decision was irrevocable. He had already as good as burned his boats, and he felt a sort of rising pleasure in contemplation of his well-arranged future.

Joyce, meanwhile, had missed her signet-ring immediately, and sent for the amah. The old Chinese woman waddled in, her brown face shining with grease and excitement. She had meant to keep the secret, but confronted with her puzzled young mistress, she could not resist temptation. She cupped her hands over Joyce's ear and whispered, "Tuan Whitworth take um. Your Tuan. He take um to Penang. He say for measure your finger."

Joyce's eyes lit up like blue stars. She caught the old amah in her arms and kissed her, and ran out of the room. That day her father thought she had got a touch of the sun. She could not keep still. Her happiness was so great that it could not be contained, but bubbled out of her in snatches of song and laughter.

"*Jeff!*" her heart cried. "Oh, Jeff—"

The train was unusually full coming back, for there was a P. and O. boat in. Jeff thought he had secured a compartment to himself, but at the last moment two people got in. They had a vast quantity of baggage labelled for Soolong, and for a moment Jeff was puzzled.

Then he remembered. They must be the Barings, people who had bought the McCarthy estate some twenty miles out. Their arrival had been awaited with some curiosity, current opinion being divided between sympathy and contempt. Old McCarthy had been a lazy rogue, who would have done well to get half the price Baring's agent had paid.

Jeff introduced himself. The woman had been standing with her back to him locking a suitcase, while her husband leaned out of the window arranging for the later transport of some heavy cases. She turned round, and under the big straw hat that

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shaded her face Jeff saw that her complexion was of a clear pale olive. She had a red mouth, and over her dark eyes her black eyebrows tapered delicately. And her lashes—he had never seen such lashes, even on a Malay girl.

Later, one of the things he loved best was to make her raise her eyes suddenly and watch the upward sweep of those heavy silken fringes.

He judged her to be about thirty. Baring himself was much older, a bustling, energetic, well-dressed man with a thick moustache. They obviously had money.

He wrung Jeff's hand with enthusiasm. "I suppose you were looking out for us. Very decent of you."

"Well—" began Jeff in some confusion.

"It was charming," said Mrs. Baring in a low warm voice. For a moment her eyes dwelt full on his, and he read in them, as in the lovely curves of her mouth, a subtle amusement. She knew that he had been annoyed rather than otherwise by the invasion of his compartment, and she was laughing at him. Jeff met her eyes and smiled back.

The train moved out. They sat down and talked. Or rather, Jeff answered Baring's questions. Jeff was usually delighted when newcomers availed themselves of his knowledge of the district. Today, however, it seemed to him that he had never met anyone so tiresome as this eager, inquisitive man.

He didn't want to talk about Soolong and native labour conditions. He wanted—well, he would never have consciously admitted the desire, but deep within him it was active and recognizable. At the first moment of respite from Baring's questions, he directed the conversation towards his goal.

She had removed her hat and was lying back in an attitude of languorous grace, silent, her dark gaze dwelling alternately upon Jeff and her husband. Jeff had never believed that eyes could be "melting and liquid," but now, meeting those of Laura Baring, he was suddenly struck by the aptness of that description. Her hair was night-black. She wore it in a knot at the nape of her neck.

"You're not English, are you?" Jeff asked shyly.

"Italian. From the south. But don't you think I have a perfect English accent? Everybody else does."

"It's amazing. But all the same, you couldn't deceive anyone, you know."

"I don't want to. I am not less proud of my nationality because I have had to renounce it. Only I am so conceited about my accent. It is my only accomplishment!"

She laughed, and in that tide of friendly warmth Jeff forgot his shyness. He forgot the mantle of chilly courtesy he usually

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assumed with strange women. He also forgot Baring, who now chimed in with another question.

"Exactly how far is our plantation from the town?"

"Twenty miles. It's a bad road. You'll be a bit lonely out there, I fancy. You must come in pretty often to the club."

"It is a nice club?" Mrs. Baring asked.

"One of the best in the F.M.S. You can be sure of getting a good rubber of bridge or game of billiards— "

"I don't play either," Baring said flatly.

Jeff felt snubbed. "Well, anyway, we shall hope to see something of you from time to time."

Suddenly an idea struck him. "Look here, instead of driving out to your place right away, why don't you let me put you up for the night? There's a big dance at the club. People coming in from all over the district. It would be a grand opportunity to get acquainted with a few of them."

"I don't dance," said Baring. "Besides, there's all this luggage— "

Jeff's heart sank like a stone, but suddenly Laura asserted herself. "I think it's a charming idea. Mr. Whitworth is most kind to suggest it."

"Oh, all right, then. Perhaps it might be a good thing."

It was clear that Baring did not always get the last word.

Jeff's spirits rose again with a bound, as if his destiny had hung on the acceptance or refusal of his invitation. It did not even occur to him that this was a very peculiar state of affairs.

Joyce had put on a new frock for the occasion. A billowing thing of white organdie that made her look very slight and childish. She had not seen Jeff alone since he got back, for the train came in rather late. She had been unable to sleep for excitement all the night before, but she showed no trace of fatigue. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes glowed.

Cars and buggies drove up. The long L-shaped room was filled with light and music, with men in white mess-jackets and women in colours of orchid brilliance.

Jeff was late. Joyce went again and again to the entrance.

When at last he appeared, she was astonished to find him arm-in-arm with a strange foreign-looking woman. He said without preamble, "This is Mrs. Baring. She's just arrived. We must see she has a good time, because her husband doesn't dance."

Nothing else. Not a word of greeting or apology for being late.

The woman was holding out her hand to Joyce and smiling with a winning sweetness. She was exotically beautiful in her dark red dress, with her black hair shining like silk. Beside her,

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Joyce felt herself to be colourless and negligible. As in a dream, she took the proffered hand. She forced herself to smile back, to talk.

The whole evening had about it a nightmare feeling of unreality. It could not really be true, this crushing anti-climax to the exultation of the past forty-eight hours. It could not actually be turning out like this—this which was to have been the most wonderful evening of her life. She moved about in a daze, watching with wide incredulous eyes Jeff's attentions to Laura Baring.

Baring, apparently, was in the bar, where he seemed amiably resigned to passing the evening. Jeff darted about, gathering little groups of his friends and bringing them to be introduced to the newcomers, so that Laura never lacked partners.

As the dance wore on it was plain that he regretted his own assiduousness, for she was greatly admired and it became a matter of competition to secure a turn with her. He himself was therefore reduced to dancing almost exclusively with Joyce. This meant added misery for her, instead of consolation, for his eyes were abstracted and his thoughts fixed obviously elsewhere.

Everybody knew, thanks to the Powells' amah, that Jeff Whitworth had gone to Penang to buy Joyce's engagement-ring, and that he had not yet offered it to her. Public opinion swerved round like a weather-vane. Its sympathy was now all for Joyce, who became a figure of martyrdom at the hands of a wicked and dangerous woman.

The Barings were practically ostracized during their brief visits to Soolong. Understandably, they made as few appearances as possible and only drove in when necessity arose.

This did not stop Jeff from finding a dozen shallow pretexts for dropping in on them. His infatuation made him oblivious to all sense of decency and prudence. The wonder is that he did not draw upon himself the censure he deserved, but public opinion continued obstinately to rank him with Joyce as a " victim."

What Baring thought about it all is not very clear. He was a heavy drinker, and in this way escaped from a situation that had probably arisen before. Many people wondered why he did not kick Jeff out of his house, but he treated the lovers with the bland indifference he would have accorded to a pair of naughty children.

Laura herself had been no more than amused by Jeff's persistence, at first. When she realized how matters stood she was greatly shocked, and after some two months she remonstrated with him severely.

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"My dear, this has got to stop. I'd have said so at the beginning if I'd known—"

"If you had known what?"

"That you were engaged to Joyce Powell. I'd heard rumours, of course. But as you never mentioned it yourself, I had to ignore them. Then yesterday the Rushtons came over, and they told me the truth."

Jeff flushed and burst out, "It's not the truth. It's a damn lie!"

"Oh, my dear—"

"I'm not engaged to her. I should have been, the very night you arrived, if I hadn't happened to meet you on the train. That was a stroke of fate, don't you see?"

She shook her head sadly. The moonlight gleamed on her hair, making two silver paths across it. They were standing at the bottom of the long garden, under a cassia tree.

Baring's voice sounded from the verandah, calling to his head boy for more gin.

"Fate planned that meeting," Jeff reiterated, "before I could commit myself. A few hours would have altered the whole course of my life. A few hours and it would have been too late. As it is, I'm free to make my own choice. The ghastly thing is that you're not."

"I'm freer than you are, in one respect."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Jeff dear, that no man is free who is loved as that girl loves you."

His voice rose in distress. "But that's absurd. Can I help it? Is it my fault that she's chucked herself at me ever since I came out? It's been the standing joke of the station, the way she's made a fool of me."

"And you in your turn? What are you doing to me?" she asked softly.

He drew back as though she had struck him. Covering his face with his hands, he said in a strangled voice, "Laura, tell me you don't mean that."

She made no answer but reached up and gently disengaged his hands. He stared at her out of a wild haggard face, then suddenly dropped to his knees and buried his head against her fragrant body. He was shaking with an intensity of passion she had not suspected in him.

"Oh Laura, try to love me a little. Try to love me—"

The hungry cry touched some waiting chord of response. Her pity overflowed. She stooped and gathered him into her arms, murmuring snatches of Italian.

"*Si, caro, ti amo, ti amo. Vieni, vieni—*"

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For a time they openly abandoned all constraint. Baring drank himself into a state of convenient oblivion, while Jeff came daily to the bungalow. His days with Laura were a total contrast to those he had spent with Joyce.

Laura had all the physical indolence of her race. She would lie for hours at a time on a couch in the living-room, sometimes talking of Italy, sometimes silent, with her eyes half closed.

Of Joyce they never spoke, though both of them were aware that the girl had passed those two months in a stupor of misery. She had lost weight, there were dark rings of sleeplessness round her eyes. She wanted to die. Every night she went to bed praying that she might not waken in the morning to another day of agony and humiliation.

Her signet-ring had appeared again on her dressing-table, tactfully replaced by the amah without comment. She had scarcely seen anything of Jeff since the night of the dance, and during their few and uncomfortable meetings he never revealed by the least hint his purchase of the sapphire. Mercifully, she was not to know that he had offered it to Laura Baring. Mercifully, too, no one said to her, "Have you and Jeff quarrelled?"

In a small community like Soolong, where gossip was the principal diversion and nobody's affairs were private property for long, the truth was too widely known. There was no sense in hiding herself, so she continued to ride and join in the activities of the younger set. But she did everything with a mechanical listlessness. Even her voice had changed: it was toneless, frozen. Her father thought that she was heading for a nervous breakdown.

He said to George Hollis, "You know, I'm damned worried about the child—mainly because there's nothing whatever I can do to help her. Even if Jeff had actually proposed, it'd be very difficult. However, it appears he hasn't. I taxed her with it, and she admitted the truth."

"Have a talk with her," George suggested.

The Resident smiled wryly. "I suppose all fathers are a bit scared of their daughters. I know I am. I wish to God her mother was alive."

Nevertheless, that evening he went into Joyce's room. With awkward shyness he began to plead with her.

"Now look here, you've got to get this into your head. Young men of Jeff's age are liable to these infatuations. There are women who affect them in that way. If you love him as I think you do, you'll understand and make allowances. These things don't last, my dear. He'll be back. And then it will be up to you to forgive him, if you can. No one can advise you about that."

Joyce's head, held desperately averted, dropped suddenly to

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her father's shoulder. Her grief was the more touching because it was mute. His arm tightened about her.

" Believe me, my dear, he'll be back. I've heard all the new rumours, about his wanting her to get free and marry him, and they don't mean a thing. The Barings are Catholics. There can be no question of a divorce. Give him time to realize the hopelessness of it, and the thing will die a natural death.

The kindly practical words went deep. During the days that followed, Joyce told herself a hundred times, " She can't get free. He can't marry her—he can't marry her ! " It was the one ray of light on an otherwise black horizon.

She can't get free. Curious that those four words should spell hope for one and despair for another. All the time, throughout even his happiest hours in Laura's presence, they resounded in Jeff's mind with the pitiless insistence of a death knell.

The rhino hunt took place shortly before the rains came. It was organized by the Sultan in honour of a visiting celebrity. Jeff, George Hollis, Baring, and, of course, the Resident himself were among those invited.

Preparations went on for days beforehand. There was great excitement and competition in the kampongs among Malay and Chinese coolies. Eventually the noisy and colourful procession started off down river in the flat-bottomed boats known as dug-outs.

The Sultan was a fat little man in native dress of sarong and baju. His two sons were impeccably elegant in drill suits, topis, and leggings. They spoke English with a pronounced Oxford accent.

Jeff and Baring were in the same dug-out. Fate seemed deliberately to throw them together throughout the trip. When the company left the boats and wound off along the foothills in a long snaky file, the two men found themselves walking side by side. Jeff was acutely conscious of the embarrassment of the position. Not so Baring. Jeff did not know quite what to make of him. Either he had a kind of contemptuous confidence in Laura, or he had ceased to care whether she was faithful to him or not.

Or else—an illuminating thought occurred to Jeff as he tramped through the short scrub grass : it was not impossible that Baring derived a sadistic satisfaction from the affair. It was, after all, an impasse. There was no need for him to act. Passively, by the mere fact of his existence, he prevented the union of the lovers. Let them torment themselves. He knew his Laura.

The palms and mangroves of the river-bank were left behind.

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Already they had crossed a wide belt of foot-hills and before them loomed the green immensity of the forest. The straggling file of carriers, guides, Dyak hunters, and Europeans began to close up a little.

Jeff kept on with smooth steady stride and unseeing eyes, burdened with his thoughts. Baring talked. Beneath that amiable and slightly didactic discourse on the more up-to-date methods employed on the rubber estates in North Borneo, Jeff fancied he heard more than once a faint note of amusement. He became more and more silent, every now and then darting a sidelong glance at his companion, hoping to catch on the man's lips that smile which he could constantly hear in his voice.

But Baring's face was a mask. A red, affable, perspiring mask perpetually turned to the trail, which wound away before them. He did not see Jeff's glances. They might have heightened his amusement, or caused him some apprehension. Jeff had his full share of youth's hatred of the inscrutable.

They camped for the night on the fringes of the forest. The busy figures of the Chinese cooks moved against the glow of firelight. The Dyak hunters made their own camp some distance away. They shouted and danced and got drunk on arak to fortify themselves for the hunt the next day.

At dawn the drive began. Once again Jeff found himself moving off beside Baring. He realized, with a quickening of the pulses, that this time it was no mere coincidence. The man was purposely seeking him out, enjoying his discomfort.

It seemed to Jeff, after this, that the green depths of the jungle with all that they contained of vivid seething life waited in a hush of expectancy for the outcome of that fateful morning. Premonitions of sinister imminence swam into his mind. He wondered if Baring meant to kill him. Panic made the cold sweat start on his backbone; then this gave place to a dull and smouldering rage.

The Dyaks were strung out in a thin line, beating through a copse of bamboo, while the guns waited warily up-wind.

Jeff and Baring were standing almost shoulder to shoulder when the shout went up and a huge snorting form thundered past them at a little distance among the bamboos.

The rhinoceros is among the most dangerous of beasts by reason of its ferocity and its invulnerability to all but the most expert marksmanship. But it is also stupid, and its tactics when surprised are invariably the same. Relying on scent alone, it will charge blindly in the direction from which the wind brings warning of an enemy.

True to form, this beast crashed by, heading for the guns,

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ignoring the yelling line of beaters whom it could hear and see but could not smell. Having covered about half the distance, however, it suddenly came to a halt, swerved, snorted, and faced about in the opposite direction.

Baring and Jeff relaxed their vigilance. The beast had passed them. They were out of this hunt, at any rate. They pushed through a tangle of thorns and emerged into a clearing in the centre of which grew a mis-shapen palm.

The spot was an irregular circle of baked yellow grass set into the dense shade of the forest. Around it towered great creeper-hung trees in which sat watchful hordes of monkeys and brilliant birds. It was a miniature amphitheatre in which was to be enacted a swift and gruesome tragedy.

Baring took off his topi and mopped his brow. "God, what I could do to a gin sling!"

Jeff was unaccountably uneasy. "Let's get out of this," he said. He did not know what it was about the place that oppressed and alarmed him. Later he realized that it had been the uncanny silence.

"What's up?" Baring asked.

And in that same moment they heard the sound that caused them to stop short as though they had been turned to stone. A hoarse grunting and blowing came from somewhere on the outskirts of the clearing. The sun blinded them as they peered into the shadows.

Jeff saw it first—the tremendous grey form of a bull rhino, motionless, hideous as an apparition from the Pit, its leathern flanks heaving, little pig-like red eyes fixed on the two men.

Baring, following the direction of his companion's gaze, gave a gasp of horror. "*God!*"

"Keep still—" Jeff whispered frantically.

But it was too late. Baring's nerve went. He began to run. Instantly the great horned head in the shadows was lowered, the tufted tail came up and the beast charged.

There came one of those fractional moments when destiny hovers on the brink of fulfilment. On the edge of the clearing, in full sunlight, actuated by indecision over its divided quarry, the rhino paused.

Its head swung again towards Baring.

It seemed to Jeff in that infinitesimal pause as though time ceased to be; as though in all creation there was nothing but the arrested avalanche of doom and the flying figure of Baring.

His rifle had leapt automatically to his shoulder. The beast was less than thirty feet away, stock-still. He could have shot it through one of those small bloodshot eyes upon which he had

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already drawn a bead. Never had his hand been so steady and sure. His finger closed on the trigger.

Closed, but did not press. His whole being cried out in agonized protest during that moment when all creation waited, and his finger refused to pull the trigger.

There was a drumming of hoofs that shook the earth as the rhino launched its ton-weight armour-plated body across the clearing. After that, nothing. Silence, save for the shrieks of fleeing monkeys and the drumming noise growing faint with distance.

Silence, and the ghastly mangled thing that was Baring's body lying there by the palm tree.

It was not till after the funeral that Jeff found a chance to talk to Laura alone. Whatever the rest of the colony thought of her privately, they did not allow this to interfere with their duty towards her as a tragic widow. They considered she had treated her husband very badly ; but at least she had had no part in the accident of his death.

There were some whose secret feeling was one of envy, now that fate had played so dramatically into the lovers' hands. It was taken for granted that, once she was out of mourning, she would marry Jeff Whitworth. Among those who held this opinion were Jeff himself, and Joyce Powell.

Exaltation alone had kept Jeff from breaking down under the strain of the past three days. Alternate waves of terror, remorse, and joy swept over him. At times he hated himself so much that he wanted to die. At others, his memory became confused and it seemed as though it were not he who had been indirectly responsible for Baring's death, but some higher power who chose to take a hand in the drama, so that he and Laura might be baulked of their happiness no longer.

He had indeed half persuaded himself that this was the case, and as he hurried up the steps of the Baring bungalow his face was alight with expectation. He had thought to find Laura waiting for him with equal eagerness. But she was not. There was no answer when he called her name. He strode into the living-room.

She was sitting on the edge of the couch, with one of Baring's drill shirts in her lap, her fingers listlessly pleating the fabric into folds. Her eyelids were swollen with weeping.

This was the last thing he had expected, and the exultation drained out of him. He stood before her, humbled, like a child overcome by the consequences of its own misdeed. He was afraid to touch her.

At last he knelt beside her and gently put his arms round her.

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He murmured, " Laura, you've got to forget how it happened. To forget everything except that this is the way out for us. The way that seemed closed."

He felt her draw back a little, but he went on rapidly. " We'll take it together. Promise me that, Laura. The gods were on our side, after all. He didn't suffer, I swear it. The brute was on us before we had any warning. The sun was in our eyes. He went down like a ninepin. It was all over in a second."

She said in a stifled voice, " It isn't that."

" Then—oh Laura, you can't doubt that it was meant to be like this ? Otherwise it might have been me."

Again he felt her stiffen in his arms. A pang of apprehension shook him. " Promise—promise— "

With a great effort she said, " It's too soon, Jeff."

Instantly he was all remorse. " God, I'm a clumsy fool. The shock must have been awful for you. Forgive me, my darling. You see, I couldn't wait. I had to know. Well, anyway, we shan't discuss it till you feel more yourself again. You must rest, Laura. Try to sleep. I'll come to you tomorrow."

" No ! " Suddenly she pulled herself away from him and stood up. " Perhaps we should talk, after all. We are not the only ones to be considered. There is Joyce. You feel that, don't you ? "

" I'm damned if I do," he replied roughly. " What's it got to do with us ? "

" Something, I think."

" But it's crazy—senseless. There are two of us. We love each other. Do we have to deny ourselves merely because our happiness entails someone else's suffering ? " He went on more gently, " It hasn't mattered before. After all, Joyce is young enough to get over it."

" So are you. There's that, too. Do you know that I am eight years older than you ? "

" I don't care."

" Maybe not now. But you might, one day. You might care, too, about other things."

" What things ? What are you talking about ? "

She began to speak in a hurried desperate manner, quite unlike her.

" Hasn't it occurred to you that if we married, you would have to leave Soolong ? It would be impossible for you to stay here. And you have everything to lose. I'm not worth such a sacrifice. A man's work outlives his love— "

" Are you trying to drive me mad, standing there mouthing platitudes ? " In his rising consternation he noticed that she was

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still holding the crumpled shirt. He went to her and tried to pull it away, but she snatched it back as though he were committing a sacrilege. She hugged it to her breast and fondled it as if it had been Baring's limp body.

Jeff was aghast. At the same time, passionate rebellion shook him. Was it for this that he had jeopardized his immortal soul? For this, the hours of self-torture and the searing on his memory for all time of that sickening sight in the clearing?

"Evasions and excuses, one after the other. You can't think them up fast enough, and not one of them is worth a row of beans. Only one thing counts now. Answer me this: do you love me? Laura, answer me, for God's sake."

She looked at him dumbly. Then, as though he were threatening her, she backed away until her groping hand found the door of her bedroom. Her head fell back against the panel and she closed her eyes. He gripped her by the shoulders so hard that his nails dug into her flesh. "Answer me!"

Still she was mute.

He began to shout. A jumbled spate of supplication and abuse poured out of him.

"I did it for you. I damned myself to hell, and all for nothing. For lies, lies lies! You never wanted me. How could you have done this? Don't you care that I'll be haunted to the end of my days?"

If he was aware that he had betrayed himself not only to her but to any eavesdropping house-boy, he seemed indifferent to it.

But suddenly she opened her eyes and stared into his face. In that piercing gaze he read such horror, such loathing and contempt that his soul shrivelled within him.

And still she said nothing. Perhaps she was beyond speech. Perhaps she knew that there was nothing to be said. If a man has it in his power to save another's life and does not do so, is he guilty of that man's death? Legally, no. Ethically? That's another matter. At all events, Jeff Whitworth was already starting his punishment.

Laura tore herself from his grip and slipped into the inner room. The door closed in his face, and he heard the key turn in the lock. Beside himself, he hammered on the door. The tears rained down his face.

"Laura—Laura, let me in!"

They were the last words he was to speak to her. She left next day for Penang, taking only her personal possessions, and caught the first outward boat.

There were those who took the cynical view that she knew her

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own nature all too well, and that after Baring's worldly tolerance she could not face being tied for the rest of her life to the jealous devotion of a man like Jeff. But the truth is, probably, that she had felt pity for Jeff—and perhaps for other men before him—but at heart was faithful to the one she had loved and married. Why this should have been Baring, plain, stolid, a bore—and a drunkard, into the bargain—is one of nature's riddles.

When George Hollis had got as far as this he stopped, as though he had finished the story.

The night wind touched my forehead with a cool caress and stirred the leaves of the casuarina tree in the garden. The clamour of bullfrogs and cicadas had, I suppose, been going on all the time; but when George's voice halted, it seemed that those others broke out again with redoubled force.

I sat up, found that my cheroot had gone out, sighed, and poured myself a drink.

"Well?" I said.

"Well, what?"

"He married Joyce, after all."

"Of course he did," George said impatiently. "It took time, though. He was all in. They sent him up country for a spell.

"When he came back he found in Joyce the same sympathy and understanding that she had always offered him. His need was pretty bad and he accepted thankfully. My God, the divine forgiveness of women!

"They were married, as far as I can remember, about six months afterwards."

"It seems," I said, "to have worked out very well. I don't know when I've met a couple who appeared to be such good friends, in the deepest sense of the word."

"They understand each other, you see. Neither of them had any illusions, after what had happened. But they had a great deal of mutual sympathy. And that is a solid foundation for matrimony."

George himself is a confirmed and rabid bachelor.

"What the hell do you know about it?" I asked rudely.

"That," said he, "is another story."

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★ SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

THE MAN FROM THE MORGUE

Her blue eyes were wide with fearful fascination as she gazed

by ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

IT was his receptionist's evening off, and Dr. Blain had to answer the waiting-room buzzer himself. Mentally cursing the prolonged absence of Tod Mercer, his general factotum, he closed the tap of the burette, took the beaker of neutralized liquid from beneath, and set it on a shelf.

He thrust a folding spatula into his waistcoat pocket, rubbed his hands together, gave a brief glance around the small laboratory. Then he carried his tall, spare form to the waiting-room.

The visitor was sprawled in an easy chair. Dr. Blain looked him over and saw a cadaverous individual with mackerel eyes, mottled skin, and pale, bloated hands. The fellow's clothes didn't fit him much better than a sack.

Blain weighed him up as a case of pernicious ulcers, or else a hopeful seller of insurance that he had no intention of buying. In any event, he decided, the man's expression had a weird twist. It gave him the willies.

"Dr. Blain, I believe?" said the man in the chair. His voice gargled slowly, uncannily, and the sound of it grew pimples down Blain's spine.

Without waiting for a reply, and with his dead optics fixed on the standing Blain, the visitor continued, "We are a cadaverous individual with mackerel eyes, mottled skin, and pale, bloated hands." Sitting down abruptly, Dr. Blain grasped the arms of his chair until his knuckles stood out like blisters.

His visitor gargled on slowly and imperturbably, 'Our clothes don't fit us much better than a sack. We are a case of pernicious ulcers, or else a seller of insurance that you have no intention of buying. Our expression has a strange twist, and it gives you the willies."

The speaker rolled an eye that leered, with horrible lack of lustre, at the thunderstruck Blain. He added, "Our voice gargles, and the sound of it raises pimples on your spine. We

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have eyes that leer at you with lack of lustre that you consider horrible."

With a mighty effort, Blain leaned forward, red-faced, trembling. His iron-grey hairs were erect on the back of his neck. Before he could open his mouth, his visitor spoke his unuttered words for him: "Good heavens! You've been reading my very thoughts!"

The fellow's cold optics remained riveted to Blain's astounded face while the latter shot to his feet. Then he said briefly, simply, "Sit down."

Blain remained standing. Small globules of perspiration crept through the skin of his brow, trickled down his tired, lined face.

More urgently, warningly, the other gulped, "Sit down!"

His legs strangely weak at the knees, Blain sat. He stared at the ghastly pallor of his visitor's features and stammered, "W-who the devil are you?"

"That!" He tossed Blain a clipping.

A casual look, followed by one far more intent, then Blain protested, "But this is a newspaper report about a corpse being stolen from a morgue."

"Correct," agreed the being opposite.

"But I don't understand." Blain's strained features showed his puzzlement.

"This," said the other, pointing a colourless finger at his sagging waistcoat, "is the corpse."

"*What?*" For the second time, Blain came to his feet. The clipping dropped from his nerveless fingers, fluttered to the carpet. He towered over the thing in the chair, expelled his breath in a loud hiss, and sought vainly for words.

"This is the body," repeated the claimant. His voice sounded as if it were being bubbled through thick oil. He pointed to the clipping. "You failed to notice the picture. Look at it. Compare the face with the one that we have."

"We?" Blain queried, his mind in a whirl.

"We! There are many of us. We commandeered this body. Sit down."

"But—"

"Sit down!" The creature in the chair slid a cold, limp hand inside his sloppy jacket, lugged out a big automatic, and pointed it awkwardly. To Blain's view, the weapon's muzzle gaped hugely. He sat down, recovered the clipping, and stared at the picture.

The caption said, "The late James Winstanley Clegg, whose body mysteriously vanished last night from the Simmstown Morgue."

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Blain looked at his visitor, then at the picture, then at his visitor again. The two were the same; undoubtedly the same. Blood began to pound in his arteries.

The automatic drooped, wavered, and lifted up once more. "Your questions are anticipated," slobbered the late James Winstanley Clegg. "No, this is not a case of spontaneous revival of a cataleptic. Your idea is ingenious, but it does not explain the thought-reading."

"Then what is this a case of?" demanded Blain with sudden courage.

"Confiscation." His eyes jerked unnaturally. "We have entered into possession. Before you is a man possessed." He permitted himself a ghoulish chuckle. "It seems that in life this brain was endowed with a sense of humour."

"Nevertheless, I can't—"

"Silence!" The gun wagged to emphasize the command. "We shall talk; you will listen. We shall comprehend your thoughts."

"All right." Dr. Blain lay back in his chair, kept a wary eye on the door. He felt convinced that he had to deal with a madman. Yes, a maniac—despite the thought-reading, despite that picture on the cutting.

"Two days ago," gargled Clegg, or what once had been Clegg, "a so-called meteor landed outside this town."

"I read about it," Blain admitted. "They looked for it, but failed to find it."

"That phenomenon was actually a space vessel." The automatic sagged in the flabby hand; its holder rested the weapon on his lap. "It was a space vessel that had carried us from our home world of Glantok. The vessel was exceedingly small by your standards—but we, too, are small. Very small. We are sub-microscopic, and our number is myriad.

"No, not intelligent germs." The ghastly speaker stole the thought from his listener's mind. "We are less even than those." He paused while he searched around for words more explicit. "In the mass, we resemble a liquid. You might regard us as an intelligent virus."

"Oh!" Blain struggled to calculate the number of jumps necessary to reach the door, and do it without revealing his thoughts.

"We Glantokians are parasitical in the sense that we inhabit and control the bodies of lesser creatures. We came here, to your world, while occupying the body of a small Glantokian mammal." He coughed with a viscous rumble deep down in his gullet, then continued.

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"When we landed and emerged, an excited dog chased our creature and caught it. We caught the dog. Our creature died when we deserted it. The dog was useless for our purpose, but it served to transport us into your town and find us this body. We acquired the body. When we left the dog, it lay on its back and died."

The gate creaked with a sudden rasping sound that brought Blain's taut nerves to the snapping point. Light footsteps pit-patted up the asphalt path toward the front door. He waited with bated breath, ears alert, eyes wide with apprehension.

"We took this body, loosened the rigid joints, softened the dead muscles, and made it walk. It seems that its brain was fairly intelligent in life, and even in death its memories remain recorded. We utilize this dead brain's knowledge to think in human terms and to converse with you after your own fashion."

The approaching footsteps were near, very near. Blain shifted his feet to a solid position on the rug, tightened his grip on the arms of his chair, and fought to keep his thoughts under control. The other took not the slightest notice, but kept his haggard face turned to Blain and continued to mouth his words.

"Under our control, the body stole these clothes and this weapon. Its own defunct mind recorded the weapon's purpose and told us how it is used. It also told us about you."

"Me?" Startled, Dr. Blain leaned forward, braced his arms, and calculated that his intended spring would barely beat the lift of the opposing automatic.

The feet outside had reached the steps.

"It is not wise," warned the creature who claimed to be a corpse. He raised his gun with lethargic hand. "Your thoughts are not only observed but their conclusions anticipated."

Blain relaxed. The feet were tripping up the steps to the front door.

"A dead body is a mere makeshift," the other mouthed. "We must have a live one, with little or no organic disability. As we increase, we must have more bodies. Unfortunately, the susceptibility of nervous systems is in direct proportion to the intelligence of their owners." He gasped, then choked with the same liquid rattle as before.

"We cannot guarantee to occupy the bodies of the intelligently conscious without sending them insane in the process. A disordered brain is less use to us than a recently dead one, and no more use than a wrecked machine would be to you."

The patter of footsteps ceased; the front door opened, and somebody entered the passage. The door clicked shut. Feet moved along the carpet towards the waiting-room.

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"Therefore," continued the human who was not human, "we must occupy the intelligent while they are too deeply unconscious to be affected by our permeation, and we must be in complete possession when they awake. We must have the assistance of someone able to treat the intelligent in the manner we desire, and do it without arousing general suspicion. In other words, we require the co-operation of a doctor."

The awful eyes bulged slightly. Their owner added, "Since this inefficient body is beyond even our power to animate much longer, we must have a fresh, live, healthy one as soon as it can be obtained."

The feet in the passage hesitated, stopped. The door opened. At that instant, the dead Clegg stabbed a pallid finger at Blain and burbled, "You will assist us"—the finger swerved towards the door—"and that body will do for the first."

The girl in the doorway was young, fair-haired, pleasingly plump. She paused there, one hand concealing the crimson of her small, half-opened mouth. Her blue eyes were wide with fearful fascination as they gazed at the blanched mask behind the pointing finger.

There was a moment's deep silence, while the digit maintained its fateful gesture. Its owner's features became subject to progressive achromatism, grew more hueless, more ashy. His eyes—dead balls in frigid sockets—suddenly glittered with minute specks of light, green light, hellish. He struggled clumsily to his feet, teetered backwards and forwards on his heels.

The girl gasped. Her eyes lowered, saw the automatic in a hand escaped from the grave. She screamed on a note weak because of its height. She screamed as if she were surrendering her soul to the unknown. Then, as the living dead tottered towards her, she closed her eyes and slumped.

Blain got her just before she hit the floor. He covered the distance in three frantic leaps, caught her smoothly moulded body, saved it from bruising contact. He rested her head upon the carpet, patted her cheeks vigorously.

"She's fainted," he growled, in open anger. "She may be a patient or may have come to summon me to a patient. An urgent case, perhaps."

"Enough!" The voice was curt, despite its eerie bubbling. The gun pointed directly at Blain's brow. "We see, from your thoughts, that this fainting condition is a temporary one. Nevertheless, it is opportune. You will take advantage of the situation, place the body under an anæsthetic, and we shall claim it for our own."

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From his kneeling position beside the girl, Blain looked up and said slowly and deliberately, " I shall see you in hell ! "

" No need to have spoken the thought," remarked the creature. He grimaced horribly, took two jerky steps forward. " You may do it yourself, or else we shall do it with the aid of your own knowledge and your own flesh. A bullet through your heart, we take possession of you, repair the wound, and you are ours.

" Damn you ! " he cursed, stealing the words from Blain's own lips. " We could use you in any case, but we prefer a live body to a dead one."

Throwing a hopeless glance around the room, Dr. Blain uttered a mental prayer for help—a prayer cut short by the grin of understanding on his opponent's face.

Getting up from his knees, he lifted the girl's limp form, carried her through the door, along the passage, and into his surgery. The thing that was the body of Clegg stumbled grotesquely behind him.

Gently lowering the girl to a chair, Blain rubbed her hands and wrists, patted her cheeks again. Faint colour crept back to her skin ; her eyes fluttered. Blain stepped to a cupboard, slid aside its glass doors, grasped a bottle of sal volatile. Something hard prodded him between his shoulder-blades. It was the automatic.

" You forget that your mind processes are like an open book. You are trying to revive the body and are playing for time." The sickly countenance behind the weapon forced its facial muscles into a lop-sided scowl. " Place the body on that table and anæsthetize it."

Unwillingly, Dr. Blain withdrew his hand from the cupboard. He picked up the girl, laid her on the examination table, switched on the powerful lamp that hung directly overhead.

" More meddling ! " commented the other. " Turn off that lamp—the one already burning is quite sufficient."

Blain turned off the lamp. His face drawn with agitation, but head erect, his fists bunched, he faced the menacing weapon, and said, " Listen to me. I'll make you a proposition."

" Nonsense ! " The former Clegg wandered around the table with slow, dragging steps. " As we remarked before, you are playing for time. Your own brain advertises the fact." He stopped abruptly as the recumbent girl murmured vague words and tried to sit up. " Quick ! The anæsthetic ! "

Before either could move, the girl sat up. She came upright and looked straight into a ghastly face that mopped and mowed a foot from her own features. She shuddered and said pitifully, " Let me out of here. Let me out. Please ! "

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A bloated hand reached out to push her. She lay down to avoid contact with it.

Taking advantage of the slight diversion, Blain slid a hand behind his back, felt for an ornamental poker hanging on the wall. The gun swung up even as his fingers found the impromptu weapon and curled round its cool metal.

"You forget yourself." Pin-point fires sparkled in the other's blotchy eyes. "Mental understanding is not limited in direction. We see you even when we are looking elsewhere." The gun moved to indicate the girl. "Tie that body down."

Obediently, Dr. Blain found straps, fastened the girl securely to the table. His grey hair was limp, his face moist, as he bent over her and threaded the buckles. He looked at her with courage hardly justified and whispered, "Patience—do not fear."

He threw a significant glance at the clock ticking upon the wall. The instrument's hands indicated two minutes before eight.

"So you expect aid," effervesced the tones of a corporate myriad. "Tod Mercer, your handy-man, who ought to have been here before now. You think he might be of help, though you have little faith in what few wits he has. In your opinion, he is a dumb ox—too stupid to know his feet from his hands."

"You devil!" swore Dr. Blain at this recital of his thoughts.

"Let this Mercer come. He will be of use—to us! There are enough of us for two bodies—and even a live fool is better than an educated corpse." Anæmic lips twisted in a snarl. "Meanwhile, get busy with that body."

"I don't think I have any ether," Blain protested.

"You have something that will do. Your cortex shouts it! Be speedy, lest we lose patience and take you at the cost of your sanity."

Swallowing hard, Blain opened a drawer and extracted a nasal frame. He clipped on its cotton-gauze pad, placed the frame over the frightened girl's nose. He felt safe in giving her a reassuring wink. A wink is not a thought.

Opening the cupboard once more, Blain stood in front of it, summoned all his faculties, and compelled his mind to recite, "Ether, ether, ether." At the same time, he forced his hand toward a bottle of concentrated sulphuric acid. He made a mighty effort to achieve his dual purpose, urged his fingers nearer to the bottle. He got it.

Straining every fibre of his being to do one thing while his mind was fixed upon another, he turned round, withdrawing the glass stopper as he turned. Then he stood still, the open bottle

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in his right hand. The figure of death was immediately in front of him, gun raised.

" Ether," sneered the vocal cords of Clegg. " Your conscious mind yelled ' Ether ! ' while your subconscious mind whispered ' Acid ! ' Do you think your inferior intelligence can cope with ours ? Do you think you can destroy that which is already dead ? You fool ! " The gun inched forward. " The anæsthetic—without further delay."

Offering no reply, Dr. Blain rammed the stopper into its neck, replaced the bottle where he had taken it. More deliberately, moving with utmost slowness, he crossed the floor to a smaller cupboard, opened it, took out a small bottle of ether. He placed the bottle on the radiator and started to close the cupboard.

" Take it off ! " croaked the uncanny voice with high-pitched urgency. The gun emitted a warning click as Blain snatched the bottle. " So you hoped the radiator would make the stuff vaporize rapidly enough to burst the bottle, eh ? "

Dr. Blain said nothing. Taking as much time as possible, he conveyed the volatile liquid to the table. The girl watched his approach, her eyes wide with apprehension. She gave a low sob.

Blain flung a glance at the clock, but, quick as the glance was, his tormentor caught the thought behind it and grinned. " He is here now."

" Who is here ? " demanded Blain.

" Your man, Mercer. He is outside, just about to enter the front door. We perceive the futile wanderings of his sluggish mind. You have not underestimated what little intelligence he does possess."

The front door opened in confirmation of the speaker's prophecy. The girl struggled to raise her head, hope in her eyes.

" Prop her mouth open with something," articulated the voice under alien control. " We shall enter through the mouth." He paused, as heavy feet scuffled on the front-door mat. " And call that fool in here. We shall use him also."

His veins bulging on his forehead, Dr. Blain called, " Tod ! Come here ! " He found a dental gag, toyed with its ratchet.

Excitement thrilled his nerves from head to feet. No gun could shoot two ways at once. If he could wangle the idiotic Mercer into the right position, and put him wise—If he could be on one side and Tod on the other—

" Don't try it," advised the animated Clegg. " Don't even think it. If you do, we shall end up by having you both."

Tod Mercer lumbered into the room, his heavy soles thumping the rug. He was a big man, with thick shoulders jutting below a

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plump, moon-like face that sprouted two days' growth. He stopped when he saw the table and the girl. His great, wide, stupid eyes roamed from the girl to the doctor.

"Heck, Doc," he said, with an uneasy fidget, "I got me a puncture and had to change tyres on the road."

"Never mind about that," came a sardonic rumble right behind him. "You're in plenty of time."

Tod turned around sluggishly, twisting his boots as if each weighed a ton. He stared at the thing that had been Clegg and said, "Beg pardon, Mister. I didn't know you was there."

His cow-like eyes wandered disinterestedly over the living corpse, over the pointing automatic, then slewed towards the anxious Blain. Tod opened his mouth to say something. He closed his mouth; a look of faint surprise came into his fat features; his eyes swivelled back and found the automatic again.

This time, the look didn't last one-tenth of a second. His eyes realized what they saw. He swung a ham-like fist with astounding swiftness, slammed it into the erstwhile Clegg's awful features. The blow was dynamite, sheer dynamite. The cadaver went down with a crash that shook the room.

"Quick!" screamed Dr. Blain. "Get the gun." He vaulted the intervening table—girl and all—landed heavily, made a wild kick at the weapon still gripped in a flabby hand.

Tod Mercer stood abashed, his eyes turning this way and that. The automatic exploded thunderously; its slug nicked the tubular metal edge of the table, ricocheted with a noise like that of a buzz saw, and ripped a foot of plaster from the opposite wall.

Blain kicked frantically. The gun boomed again. Glass tinkled in the farther cupboard. The girl on the table screamed shrilly.

The scream penetrated Mercer's thick skull and brought action. Slamming down a great boot on the rubbery wrist, he plucked the automatic from cold fingers. He hefted the weapon, pointed it.

"You can't kill it like that," shouted Blain. He jabbed Tod Mercer to emphasize his words. "Get the girl out of here. Jump to it, man, for heaven's sake!"

Blain's urgency brooked no argument. Mercer handed over the automatic, moved to the table, ripped the straps from the weeping girl. His huge arms plucked her up, bore her from the room.

Down on the floor, the pilfered body writhed and struggled to get up. Its eyes had disappeared. Their sockets were now filled with swirling pools of emerald luminosity. Its mouth gaped

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as it slowly regurgitated a bright green phosphorescence. The spawn of Glantok was leaving its host!

The body sat up with its back to the wall. Its limbs jerked and twitched in nightmarish postures. It was a fearful travesty of a human being. Green—bright and living green—crept sinuously from its eyes and mouth, formed twisting, swirling snakes and pools upon the floor.

Blain gained the door in one gigantic leap, snatching the ether bottle from the table as he passed. He stood in the doorway, trembling. Then he flung the bottle in the centre of the seething green. He flicked his automatic lighter, tossed it after the bottle. The entire room boomed into a mighty blast of flame that immediately became a fiery hell.

The girl clung tightly to Dr. Blain's arm while they stood by the roadside and watched the house burn. She said, "I came to ask you to see my young brother. We think he's got measles."

"I'll come soon," Blain promised.

A van roared up the road, stopped near them with engine still racing. A policeman put his head out and shouted, "What a blaze! We saw the glare a mile back along the road. We've called the fire brigade."

"They'll be too late, I'm afraid," said Blain.

"Insured?" asked the policeman sympathetically.

"Yes."

"Everybody out of the house?"

Blain nodded an affirmative, and the policeman said, "We happened to be out this way looking for an escaped lunatic." The van rolled forward.

"Hey!" Blain shouted. The van stopped again. "Was this madman's name James Winstanley Clegg?"

"Clegg?" came the driver's voice from the other side of the van. "Why, that's the fellow whose body walked out of the Morgue when the attendant had his back turned for a minute. Funny thing, they found a dead mongrel right by where the missing body ought to have been. The reporters are starting to call it a werewolf, but it's still a dog to me."

"Anyway, this fellow isn't Clegg," chimed in the first policeman. "He's Wilson. He's small, but nasty. This is what he looks like." He stretched an arm from the car, handed Blain a photograph.

Blain studied the picture in the light of rising flames. It bore not the slightest resemblance to his visitor of that evening. "I'll remember that face," Dr. Blain commented, handing the photograph back.

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"Know anything about this Clegg mystery?" inquired the driver.

"I know that he's dead," Blain answered truthfully.

Pensively, Dr. Blain watched flames leap skyward from his home. He turned to the gaping Mercer and said, "What beats me is how you managed to hit that fellow without his anticipating your intention and plugging you where you stood."

"I saw the gun, and I 'it 'im." Mercer spread apologetic hands. "I saw 'e'd got a gun, and I 'it 'im without thinking."

"*Without thinking!*" murmured Blain.

Dr. Blain chewed his bottom lip, stared at the mounting fire. Roof timbers caved in with a violent crash; a flood of sparks poured upwards.

With his mind, but not his ears, he heard faint threnodies of an alien wail that became weaker and weaker, and presently died away.

★ ★ ★

WALKING ON STILTS

Walking on stilts with the high bright windy sky
Wrapped round our ears and the wild geese honking by
Out of the startled marsh what a fabulous world
Of curious wonder under the brought low sky
Leaps to our gaze as our crane legs pass it by,
Our heads in clouds like banners of gauze unfurled.

Over the low-down trees our bird-tongued voices sing
Carolling above towers where bells like thimbles ring
To miniature service worshippers small as words;
So faint are those hymns we cannot hear what they sing,
Their insect-chanting is drowned by the ripple and ring
Of our stilt-high stepping like golden and mythical birds.

And see what a ninth-hour darkness drops from the sky
As turning our kite-high heads we stare the red sun in the eye
And eclipse it with a wink! How the green world droops
and wilts
Till the white moon sits on our shoulders queening the sky
And the gold stars hang from our ears to bedazzle the eye
As over the spinning-top world we go walking on stilts!

JOHN SMITH

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SOMETHING TO DECLARE

Prithee, pretty maiden, will you marry me?

W. S. GILBERT, *Patience*

Her consent she finally gave me, seated on the second bench on the right-hand side in the Long Walk in Kensington Gardens, leading from Lancaster Gate to the Albert Memorial. My proposal was made under great difficulties, as she was placed between her father and mother and I was next to her father and had to carry on a conversation with him and at the same time communicate with his daughter behind his back.

Victorian Reminiscences

Tribute

I, the man with the red scarf,
Will give thee what I have, this last week's earnings.
Take them and buy thee a silver ring
And wed me, to ease my yearnings.

For the rest, when thou art wedded
I'll wet my brow for thee
With sweat, I'll enter a house for thy sake,
Thou shalt shut doors on me.

D. H. LAWRENCE, *Gipsy*

In Earnest

When we had got about halfway up the hill, we fell into silence again, which, as usual, he was the first to break.

"My house is desolate yet, Miss Grey," he smilingly observed, "and I am acquainted now with all the ladies in my parish, and several in this town too; but not one of them will suit me for a companion . . . in fact, there is only one person in the world who will; and that is yourself; and I want to know your decision?"

"Are you in earnest, Mr. Weston?"

"In earnest! How could you think I should jest on such a subject?"

He laid his hand on mine. . .

"I hope I have not been too precipitate," he said in a serious tone. "You must have known that it was not my way to flatter

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and talk soft nonsense, or even to speak the admiration that I felt; and that a single word or glance of mine meant more than the honied phrases and fervent protestations of most other men."

I said something about not liking to leave my mother, and doing nothing without her consent.

"I settled everything with Mrs. Grey while you were putting on your bonnet," replied he. "She said I might have her consent if I could obtain yours . . . And so now I have overruled your objections on her account. Have you any other?"

"No—none."

"You love me then?" said he, fervently pressing my hand.

"Yes."

ANNE BRONTË, 1820–49, *Agnes Grey*

The Happy Yes

love is a place
& through this place of
love move
(with brightness of peace)
all places

yes is a world
& in this world of
yes live
(skilfully curled)
all worlds

E. E. CUMMINGS

Say It with Flowers

Lady Eskdale, with apparent carelessness, asked Eliza to fetch her some flowers from the conservatory, and there Ernest followed her, and a very few words on his part joined the destinies of two people about as unlike to each other, in habits, dispositions, and sentiments, as they could well be; but not the less likely on that account to be very happy in their married state.

Ernest was sincerely charmed with the shy but almost grateful assent given to his declaration by the lady of his love; and he was in an animated state of spirits when he led Eliza back to Lady Eskdale, and said, "We have forgotten your flowers, dear, but I have brought you a new niece, and you must make much of her, and coax her, for she is rather nervous, poor little soul."

THE HON. EMILY EDEN,
The Semi-Attached Couple, 1860

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Sweet Promise

A minute later Olivier joined her. Although it was quite dark she imagined she could distinguish every detail of his features—the small moustache, the clear skin, the classic profile; and all combined to place her unresistingly at his mercy.

"You are going away tomorrow," he said, "and so must I, and I shall not see you for a whole year, perhaps two. Marie-Dorée, will you forget me?"

"No, no! Never. Ah, don't be so unkind."

"Marie-Dorée, I love you. Do you love me?"

"I have loved you ever since the first day I saw you."

"Shall we get married when I return?"

"Yes, we'll get married. If you really want me."

"I do. I want all of you," he said, and he remembered the delicious pinkness of her mouth which had affected him so powerfully a few minutes earlier.

"Marie-Dorée."

"Here I am."

She was trembling, knowing that he was about to kiss her, and went to him, flinging herself, as it were, under his protection confidently for whatever voyage might lie before.

A little while later he said.

"You are beauty itself," and then in a whisper he added: "and sweetness itself too."

"For you alone," she replied.

LOUISE DE VILMORIN, *The Tapestry Bed, translated from the French by* J. H. F. MCEWEN

Soft Answers

Madam, withouten many words,
Once, I am sure, ye will or no:
And if ye will, then leave your bords
And use your wit and show it so:
And with a beck ye shall me call;
And if of one that burneth alway,
Ye have any pity at all,
Answer him fair with yea, or nay.
If it be yea, I shall be fain;
If it be nay, friends as before;
Ye shall another man obtain,
And I mine own and yours no more.

SIR THOMAS WYATT, c. 1503–42

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A QUESTION OF UPLIFT

For a woman will do anything to snare a man

by RUDOLPH UMLAND

THIS is a story that the citizens of the little town of Glovers, Colorado, will tell you if you are a stranger and appear at all interested. What's more, to prove that it's not spun out of thin air, they'll show you the little yellow house on the edge of town where Abigail Stevens used to live, the garden patch in which she used to grow tomatoes, and even, perhaps, the roadside along which she used to herd her two cows.

They'll show you these things and tell you the story, and then, if you still express any doubt, they'll take you to Clancey's store and show you George Clancey. If seeing George Clancey doesn't entirely convince you, the villagers will give you up and close their doors to you. For they'll figure—and perhaps rightly enough—that anybody who fails to perceive in George Clancey the marks of a man who has lived through just such an experience as they've been talking about must indeed be simple.

George Clancey certainly wasn't born with that surprised, hurt look on his face, as if maybe at one time he had touched a hot iron and never forgotten about it. George Clancey is an old man now. This story happened years ago.

It started when Abigail Stevens developed a bust. Abigail had lived in Glovers all her life and a sudden change in her physical appearance when she was about forty years old was something that was bound to cause astonishment in her neighbours.

Heavens, the town folk had seen Abigail day after day going about her business; they had seen her digging in her garden, tending her chickens and ducks, herding her two cows along the roadside, and coming to trade at the shops. She had always been a small wiry woman with a peaked face, a chest flat as that of an adolescent boy, and feet so long that you could easily run a wheelbarrow over her toes without so much as brushing her skirt with the handles.

Nature had erred in not having provided her with all the feminine essentials and as a result she had never appealed much

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to men. Then in a single week she had blossomed forth with a bust that was a wonder to behold. Such a thing had been nothing short of miraculous in a woman of her age.

It had set the whole town talking. The men were awed by it. "Why, dammit," they exclaimed, "Abigail's gone and got herself the purtiest bosom of any woman hereabouts!" The women were immediately suspicious. "Abigail's done something to herself," they said. "It ain't natural, not a thing of that sort." They shook their heads and discussed it among themselves in mortified whispers.

Abigail became a changed woman after she acquired the bust. Gone was her shyness, her awkwardness. She became a fluttery, coquettish, and giggly woman. She flaunted her bust—thrust it forth as if it were the prow of a ship. She was such a little mite of a person that it was questionable whether to speak of her as a woman with a bust or a bust with a woman.

Men's eyes followed her in speculative wonder. They no longer found her lacking in appeal. There wasn't one of them who didn't feel an uplift in spirit after exchanging sallies with Abigail Stevens.

But it wasn't long before the secret of Abigail's bust became known. Abigail confided in her sister, who in turn confided in a member of the Church Aid Society, and then everybody in Glovers knew.

Abigail had been getting lonely, poor thing, the sister said, living all by herself and felt it wasn't right that she should have to suffer because of an oversight on the Creator's part. For years she had tried to develop a bust such as other women had, but massage and female medicines had failed to do the trick. Finally she had read in a mail-order catalogue about Dr. Zwingle's Patented Pneumatic Breasts and had ordered a pair. The contrivances, held together by an elastic band, were made of rubber and could be inflated to whatever size was desired by means of a small hand pump.

The first day that Abigail wore Dr. Zwingle's boon to blighted womankind, she inflated them only a little. The next day, she inflated them more. Since the bust in this still nebulous stage did not seem to attract attention, she threw caution to the winds. All her life, Abigail had been envious of the banker's wife who sported the largest bust in town. A week after Abigail had received the contrivances in the mail, she had a bust which surpassed that of the banker's wife. And such an achievement, of course, could not pass unnoticed.

The men in Glovers felt a bit disappointed when they heard that Abigail's charms were artificial. It was something they did

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not want to believe. A few were even sceptical, knowing what talk the gossipy tongues of women could get started.

"I'll be gol-blasted!" sputtered Max Elton, the curio dealer. "I can't believe that little Abigail would set out to fool a fellow that way."

But Bill Mannering, the chemist, was of a different opinion. "A woman will do anything to snare her a man," he said.

Despite their knowledge of Abigail's secret, however, the men continued to display an interest in her even while they muttered, "The little fraud!" under their breath. And Abigail continued to flaunt her bust and exchange sallies with them.

A couple of months later, when George Clancey came to Glovers to assist in his uncle's shop, talk about Abigail had died down. None of it reached George's ears.

George was a tall, gangling fellow of about forty-five; he was not handsome, but he was a quiet, industrious, and most obliging fellow. He was not a particularly educated sort, either; but a man's worth isn't measured in such terms in a Western town like Glovers. George was a good shop assistant, he knew where the dry goods and groceries were in his uncle's store and he could always find the articles you wanted.

There was something else about George Clancey. He liked mountains. Some of the highest peaks of the Rockies could be seen from Glovers. On Sundays George drove his old bone-shaker to the mountains and spent the day climbing the trails through the timber and among the rocks and enjoying the beauty of Nature.

George was a lonely man. The sun on the mountaintops was the most beautiful thing he had ever known. It gave him a feeling of quiet satisfaction to gaze at this beauty. Perhaps it was because he found himself wanting to share this experience with someone that he came to fall in love with Abigail Stevens. Or perhaps it was because of Abigail's bust. Anyhow, it happened, and so swiftly did the affair progress that it had reached the hand-holding stage before the citizens of Glovers were aware of it.

George had become acquainted with Abigail when she came to the shop. Then one day he had delivered some groceries to a customer living in the country and was returning home in his old car when he saw Abigail walking along the road. He stopped and asked, "Do you want a lift, ma'am?" Abigail accepted the invitation and climbed in beside him.

George had always been a bit shy with womenfolk but somehow he found he wasn't that way with Abigail. As the rickety car bounced along the road, he told Abigail all about the beaver

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meadows he had found on his trip to the mountains the Sunday before. He told her many things about the beavers themselves, their habits, how they lived, and how they built their dams.

All the while he was talking, however, George's eyes kept straying. The odd thought had struck him that it was about time he was marrying. When he stopped the car before Abigail's house to let her out, he hadn't really wanted her to leave. There were so many other things he found himself wanting to talk to her about. When she got out of the car, he gathered sufficient courage to say, "If you don't mind, ma'am, I'd like to see you again."

"Well, Mr. Clancey," Abigail giggled, "I've always been wanting a man to fix the rain-spout on my house. It leaks dreadfully."

George fixed the rain-spout for Abigail the following evening and also found there were other things, such as the rose trellis and the garden fence, that needed fixing for Abigail. Each fixing took a separate visit and with each visit George and Abigail became better acquainted. Pretty soon they were calling each other by their first names and thrilling at the accidental touch of hand or sleeve. George also found opportunity to tell Abigail about the beauty of the sun on the mountaintops.

"Abigail, you don't know how pretty the sun is on the mountaintops," George said. "You'll have to come with me on a Sunday and see."

But Abigail was hesitant about accepting this invitation. Abigail had been seeing the mountains all her life from a distance but she had never been really close to one. The thought of climbing a mountain frightened her.

One evening when George went to see Abigail he took along a quart of wine. George and Abigail sat on the porch of Abigail's little yellow house and watched the shadows of night descend over the distant peaks. George poured two tin cups full of wine from the bottle and passed one to Abigail. Abigail took a gulp of the wine and felt its warmth steal through her.

George talked about the mountains. He told Abigail about the woman who used to live in a cabin at the foot of Herman Mountain. Folks called her Kiote Mary because when her own baby died she took a litter of coyotes to nurse. She disappeared later and nobody ever knew what happened to her. He told Abigail about Kayser's Peak, eternally snow-clad, whose summit had been scaled once by professional climbers who used ropes and other equipment. He told her again how beautiful the sun was on the mountaintops.

"Abigail," he said, "I want to take you to the mountains and

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show you how beautiful the sun is on the mountaintops. Will you come?"

When George asked this question, Abigail had drunk her third tin cup of wine. She was willing to do anything. She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. She was ready to go lion-hunting with a buggy whip.

"I'll go mountain-hunting with you, George," she said. "I'll climb Kayser's Peak with you. I want to see how beautiful the sun is on the mountaintops, George."

The rest of the week George and Abigail were happy as two lovebirds. The town folk were awakening to the affair about this time and some of the men tried to draw George out on the subject. Tom Jeffers, the barber, was cutting George's hair and remarked casually, "You know, George, the men in this town think you're a mighty lucky fellow. You're the first man Abigail Stevens ever gave the nod to. It's as though Abigail had waited all these years for you to come along."

"That so?" said George Clancey. "I wish you wouldn't use the clippers so far front, Tom."

Tom Jeffers did not continue the subject.

Another one who attempted to draw George out was Bill Mannering, the chemist. George had stopped at his shop to buy a tube of tooth-paste. While wrapping the purchase, Bill Mannering said, "Abigail Stevens was in here this morning and bought a pair of sun glasses. She said she was going mountain climbing. This is the first time in all the years I've known Abigail ever to see her show any enthusiasm about getting near a mountain. She always used to be afraid of the mountains. Know anything about it, George?"

"A lady can always get over being afraid of mountains, I reckon," said George, picking up his purchase and leaving.

The Sunday that George took Abigail to the mountains was a beautiful late-summer day. The summit of Kayser's Peak was veiled with a cloud. George felt in a talkative mood as the old car slowly climbed the road leading to the mountains. He pointed out features of the landscape and told Abigail interesting things about them. After a time George noticed that Abigail held her hands over her bust and looked a bit uneasy.

George laughed. "Oh, it's the altitude that's affecting you, Abigail," he explained. "It's nothing. You'll get used to it."

"Well, I declare!" said Abigail. "I feel light as a wren, almost as if I could fly."

When they reached the end of the road at the foot of Kayser's Peak, George and Abigail got out of the car and George slung

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the straps of their lunch-kit over his shoulders. Then, hand in hand, they started their climb through the fragrant evergreens which extended up the sides of the mountain. But soon Abigail was running ahead, looking at the lichen on the rocks, pointing here, pointing there, and asking question after question.

" George, what is this ? George, what is that ? "

Or she was exclaiming, " Oh, George, look up there ! Isn't that pretty ? "

George plodded behind, laughing at Abigail's child-like eagerness, marvelling at the way she flitted from rock to rock. Frequently he called, " Come back and walk with me, Abigail ! You'll wear yourself out." But the higher they climbed, the more nimble did Abigail seem to become. George laboured to keep her in sight. Several times he stopped to mop his brow and rest.

" Abigail, oh Abigail ! " he called. " Come back and rest a minute."

Abigail would turn and come tripping down the mountain to join him, but she was always fresh and impatient to be off again. On these occasions, George never failed to observe Abigail's bust which seemed even more voluminous than before. It was perhaps due to the exertion, he figured. After they had rested, he took her hand and they would start climbing again. But soon, on some pretext or other, Abigail would pull her hand away and go laughing and giggling up the mountain ahead of him, taking ever greater skips and leaps.

" Abigail, oh Abigail, be careful ! " George begged.

At noon they ate their lunch under some trees on the edge of a rocky precipice and watched the shadows of clouds go racing over the rugged terrain and the treetops below. They watched the sunlight, too, on the neighbouring peaks. " Oh, it's beautiful, George ! " exclaimed Abigail. " It's so beautiful ! "

George had brought along a bottle of wine and when they had emptied the bottle they both felt deliriously happy.

" Let's start climbing again ! " cried Abigail, springing suddenly from the rock on which she had been seated and starting up the trail. George was on his feet in an instant and had her in his arms. The feel of her taut bosom against him caused him to grow amorous. He lowered his face to hers and started kissing her.

" George Clancey ! " Abigail gasped, terrified, beating him with her hands. " Stop it, stop it ! Oh, stop it, George ! "

But George Clancey was reluctant to stop. He was in a most exhilarated and reckless mood.

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" It's all right, Abigail," he tried to assure her. " There isn't any harm in kissing."

He lowered his face and started kissing her again; but she squirmed, kicked him on the shins, and was out of his grasp and away. She ran up the mountain trail, her hands over her breasts, which bobbed before her like two great pumpkins. She scampered up and over rocks as George Clancey had never seen mortal scamper before. The lightest touch of her feet on the rocky trail propelled her through the air almost as if she were part bird.

" Abigail, please ! " George called as he pursued her. " Abigail, please ! "

But Abigail paid no heed to his entreaties. Perhaps she had read the desire in George Clancey's eyes when he held her and was a little frightened. Up and over the rocks she ran, laughing and giggling, sometimes turning to taunt him for his slowness.

George continued to follow behind, mopping the sweat from his forehead, and cajoling. He felt uneasy. The higher they went up the mountain, the more uneasy he became. Every time he looked up at Abigail, he was amazed to notice a further increase in the size of her bosom. When Abigail reached timberline and turned for an instant to throw a taunt back at him, he was horrified at the great size to which it had swelled. George rubbed his eyes, thinking he was not seeing right.

" Abigail, we had better start down," he called.

But Abigail giggled and ran on. Above timberline, Kayser's Peak continued in a jumbled pile of rocks, some of them rising sheer for fifty feet, terminating finally in a gigantic elephant's back. Snow lay over the summit and extended down the crevices between the rocks. Altogether, it was a grand and formidable sight. Abigail started to climb the sheerest of the rocks.

George stared incredulously.

It was unbelievable ! She went up the side of the rock as nimbly as if she were being pulled by ropes. When she had nearly reached the top, George saw her clutch suddenly at the rock. She had reached a height exposed to the winds that continually lash the high peaks above timberline. Her enormous bosom soared skyward as she clung desperately to the rock.

" Abigail, hold on ! " shouted George, excitedly stumbling up over the rocks.

But the winds pulled at her, wrestled with her, and soon won the bout. Abigail's hands slipped from the rock and she was carried away into the air.

" George ! George ! " came her plaintive cry.

" Abigail, oh *Abigail* ! " shrieked George, dumbfounded.

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George stood, powerless to aid her, and watched her lifted higher and higher into the air. Her bosom grew ever larger until, when she was in the far distance, it seemed to envelop her entire body. George watched her until he could see her no longer.

Then he turned and started running down the mountain.

When he told his amazing story to the men of Glovers, they organized a search party and scoured the mountains. But to this day no further word has been heard regarding Abigail Stevens.

Bill Mannering's theory about the occurrence is still generally accepted as the most likely explanation.

"A simple matter of physics," Bill Mannering declared. "Those patented pneumatic breasts Abigail wore were just like a couple of balloons. If you inflate a toy balloon and carry it up a mountain, you'll find it expanding more and more, the higher you climb. It might even burst before you reach the top of the mountain. Why? Because the greater the altitude, the lighter the air.

"Abigail was such a little mite of a person that when her pneumatic breasts got large they buoyed her up so it was no effort at all for her to climb. And when she got above timberline she probably was so buoyant that she didn't have enough weight to hold her to earth when the winds struck her."

George Clancey never climbed mountains again after the experience. He couldn't bear the thought of poor Abigail floating around in the high altitudes above timberline. And he always somewhat held it against the men because they hadn't told him about Abigail's bust being artificial.

George Clancey grew into a morose old man.

★ ★ ★

SELF-EVIDENT

Samuel Rogers, the poet, met Lord Dudley at one of the foreign watering-places, and began in his vain way, "What a terrible thing it is how one's fame pursues one, and that one can never get away from one's own identity! Now I sat by a lady the other night, and she began, 'I feel sure you must be Mr. Rogers.'"

"And *were* you?" said Lord Dudley, looking up into his face quite innocently

AUGUSTUS HARE, *In My Solitary Life, edited by* MALCOLM BARNES

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MARMOSETS

by PAUL ROCHE

Rarely do man and marmoset agree, whether the question is how to enjoy a bright moonlight night or how life should be lived. Even when they seem to agree, it may be for quite different reasons—as this fable shows . . .

A GROUP of marmosets were playing once in the light of the moon, and whenever the moon went behind a cloud they began to cry, and when she came out again they skipped and frisked in the greatest glee. All night long they behaved in this way: crying in misery when the moon was hidden, and uncontrollable with mirth when once again she shone.

A hunter who was trying to sleep beneath their tree looked up and said: "What infernal chattering and moaning this is—cursed be the creatures that are making it!"

"Sir," shouted down the eldest monkey, "we are marmosets, don't you know, and live by our feelings. We are happy and sad according to the waxing and waning of the moon."

"You silly things," shouted back the man. "Can you not keep quiet just for an hour?"

"That we cannot. We never do a thing against our feelings."

"Then, my friends, you are in for a great deal of trouble," cried the hunter, and flashing his knife, he made as if to swarm the tree. At which the marmosets, expecting to be slaughtered like the Holy Innocents, yelled and jabbered in panic.

"I'll give you a last chance," called the man with one foot up the tree. "You say you wait upon the phases of the moon! Well, here she comes from behind a cloud. Let me hear even a titter of merriment, and I'll come up and run my knife through the lot of you."

A funereal stillness fell upon that tree, and the moon, as she swung into view, lit up the silent, huddled gathering in the branches and the fierce-looking hunter beneath.

Five minutes passed without a sound. Then, sheathing his

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knife, the hunter laughed: " You see, my friends, it can be done ! You *can* live by principle if you try, and not give yourselves up to every passing mood."

" Oh, thank you, sir," called down the eldest monkey. " Thank you for the lesson, and thank you for your clemency."

Then all was quiet again, and no one, except his mother, heard a little imp of a marmoset squeak: " Live by principle, my whiskers ! Doesn't the fool know we were half dead with *fright* ? "

And a maternal paw gagged him.

★ ★ ★

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD

PRIZE-WINNERS OF CROSSWORD NO. 4

We are pleased to announce the three winners of Argosy's fourth Prize Crossword Competition :

Mrs. P. M. Greenacre, Highgate Lane, Farnborough, Hants.
C. W. Hale Esq., Fernhurst, Haslemere, Surrey.
Miss M. I. Somerscales, Cardiff Road, Llandaff, Cardiff.

These readers, who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Tights*. 4, *Lonsdale*. 9, *Cornet*. 10, *Stronger*. 12, *Soonest*. 13, *Emperor*. 14, *Obliteration*. 17, *Tip the scales*. 22, *Caramel*. 23, *Tap-root*. 24, *Absorber*. 25, *Obiter*. 26, *Ruthless*. 27, *Syndic*.

Down. 1, *Tuck-shop*. 2, *Gargoyle*. 3, *Thereat*. 5, *On the streets*. 6, *Scorpio*. 7, *Augury*. 8, *Errors*. 11, *Story-tellers*. 15, *Allotted*. 16, *Esoteric*. 18, *Immoral*. 19, *Capably*. 20, *Eclair*. 21, *Prosit*.

PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 7

Argosy's seventh Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first three correct solutions checked on the closing date. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 7), 3 Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.) to arrive by Wednesday, December 9th, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale February 10th.

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SAILOR, SAILOR!

What's time, on the coasts of remembrance?

by WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

I HAVE crossed oceans and seen the world's rivers, but no water has ever touched my imagination with quite the magic of the brown flood of the High Line. In High Line Ditch I launched the first ships I can remember, and there I learned to swim.

When I was ten or eleven, folks in Denver still kept cows, and in the summer I used to go out with the South Side herd. It came up the road in the clear dewless mornings, a smoke of dust past the standpipe, past the university and the professors' houses. There, bareback on my tall horse, I fell in with the other kids on theirs; musically, to the clickety-click of split hoofs, the yapping of "shep" dogs, and the seven-beat song of the meadowlark, we passed out from beneath the shade of Scholtz's orchard, cool on the road for half a mile, and mounted at the cows' pace the bald rise of the plain towards the grazing under the High Line.

The first boy out of the water clapped on first of all his cap and yelled "King!" The second yelled "Queen!" What the third yelled I have forgotten. (I have not.)

But then, with the muddy liquid still cool in the hair in the waxing heat, 'twas pleasant to lie on that baked embankment and blink down into the hollow of the world, the wide and nearly treeless valley of the South Platte broken by vivid squares of alfalfa, the Queen City a compact and intricate toy city in its bottom, the wall of the Rockies at its thither rim seeming hardly higher than we on our dyke, so immense it was in its other magnitude, visible two hundred miles from north to south, and so clear in every detail of its modelling. On the face of Pike's at seventy-five miles, between the snow and the shadows every crevice was drawn plain. I have known boys who claimed they could see the cairn of stones on Gray's.

It was pleasant, I say, as some things that are known and humdrum are pleasant, but it was not adventurous; adventure lay between the dust-yellow banks of the ditch behind. There only was distance, distance. Lying on one's stomach with the chin nearly in the water, the fifteen-foot spread of slowly sweeping, coffee-coloured water widened in the swift perspective of the

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plainsboy's dream. Ripples grew waves, waves blue rollers creamed with spume, or black waves where storms wandered and ships drove aslant with singing spars, or green glass again where privateersmen warped through the windless stealth of tropic moonlights, or the Swiss Family plundered their wreck, or Midshipman Easy rowed ashore. And once, on a day never to be forgotten, with my living eyes there, low to the water, I saw a living fish.

The best grazing, as I remember it, was to the south of the Bend; for nearly a mile there it was the freest of cactus and prairie-dog towns, all along to the barbed wire of Flack's alfalfa. That alfalfa was always, to us of the herd, what a lee shore in a gale must be to the mariner. Flack was a devil, but little less than the fear of the ranchman's violence was the terror of the cattle's "bloating," if ever they should find a fallen fence-strand and worm into that belly-deep paradise of green.

For ever it lay on our souls. For ever, from the midst of a casino game in a horse's shadow, or out of the deep of sleep, some kid would start afoot, scramble up the ditch embankment, and shade his eyes down over the scattered herd, to make sure. And if, once reassured, his gaze went astray into Flack's, across the green ribbon of the hay, to where a browner ribbon marked the melon field, and if his mouth began to water, he could shiver a little in the arid heat to think of bold Louie Swensen who, creeping in there on a night, came within an inch of putting his hand down on the pan of a wolf trap, a dim double question-mark of steel set in wait in the tangled starlight among the vines.

I shall never forgive Flack for a thing he did. He can never undo it. It is still there, twisting my life in little ways, after thirty years.

One day he came driving to us up the outside of his fence in his yellow sulky. For once his grin looked human; amity shone in his eyes.

"You kids like mushmelons?" he called from between his thin high wheels. "Got more'n I want this year. Go on in, help yourselves. What's eating you? Hope to die, I mean it. Go in there and help yourselves."

We got between the barbs. We ran through the alfalfa, through the narrow lanes made by the cross-ditches, our legs cool with the under-air, our heads dull and dazzled. We descended upon that melon field. Knives open, eyes round, drunk as gods, we scuttled on hands and knees from hill to hill, thumbing the navels of the grey-veined cantaloups, abandoning the prettiest here for one still prettier on a vine to come.

But then there came a strange figure, a lank man with a shot-gun

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threshing through the corn beyond; two figures, for behind him there waded a woman, a youngish woman with a shrill voice, a big stomach, and a little head, hallooing him on; then four, when two dogs as big as steers broke from the corn.

How we ran! How we tripped, sprawled, drowned in the green dark of the alfalfa, and up and on again, floundering, and the pads of dogs everywhere! That was the day I learned that if you face on a dog suddenly and scream on a certain note, the dog will turn tail. And that was the day we learned that Flack had sold his ranch.

I have said that it was on the soupy tide of the High Line I launched my first ship. I cannot remember, as a matter of fact, what the first one was; it was probably a buffalo chip or a length of sunflower stem. Somewhere in the procession there was a sardine tin with a horned toad for captain. I think the proudest thing I can recollect of my youth was the time I sent the *Daisy* away. The *Daisy* was a toy given me on my birthday, a skiff eight inches long, perhaps, unpainted soft wood, worth a quarter. But what was it worth to my soul! Like quicksilver in a sluice it gathered into itself the gold of fantasy; the winter cargoes it had borne across the sitting-room carpet and around Cape Sofa would have foundered the *Flying Cloud* herself; no treasure quite like the *Daisy* have I ever had.

But if a man would save his treasure, he must lose it. One summer day at the High Line, I waved the ship, manned by a sand lizard and some beetles, out of the harbour formed by the hole in the bank at the Flack ditch gate and, quite suddenly, once I had seen it clear and falling away on the brown tide that discolours the waters off the mouth of the Amazon, I turned myself round and stared in another direction, resolute never to look and never to see it again.

I am proud, I say. By that act I first created. I began a life. From the corner there of my eye of renunciation the *Daisy* stood away on a voyage that after thirty years is not yet run. How many times, has she not encircled the blue globe by now? How many times, stunned by cold and the repeated blows of the whirlpool, has she not looked at the black cliffs of Magellan, or, more sweetly wind-borne, at the cerulean wraith of Table Mountain, or, becalmed, into the slant eyes of pirates along her bulwarks in the China Seas? How many deaths has she not skirted on coral reefs with that magic keel of whitewood (with the fluff of the carpet caught in it) which neither barnacle may encrust nor weed befoul? How many others, in the narrowing leads of ice-floes, in the white wake of the whale?

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I thought I was alone that day. I had meant to be. With the *Daisy* hidden in the bulge of my blouse I had sneaked away from the horse ring, leaving the others deep in the stories herd boys tell in the sleepy early afternoon. Ray Bleeker would not have understood. He had his greatness; he could chew tobacco in school and swallow the spittle; he was a genius, his stomach was so strong. But this business he would not have fathomed; he would have run along the bank with a stick, prodding the *Daisy* off sunken tumbleweeds.

But as I stood there, staring dead south and swallowing my heart, there came to my ears a faint note of screeching. And there, away across the alfalfa, beyond the melons, deep in the corn as I had last seen her, was the woman with the big stomach and the little head, still (it seemed) denouncing me shrilly and waggling at me accusing hands. It was hard to catch her words, but I thought I made out, "That's one of 'em." Then I wanted to run. I was not alone, after all.

The new ranchman, who had come up unremarked and was standing behind me watching in a muse the departure of the *Daisy*, was more than six feet tall, and built like a slab. He had on denim pants, a cloth vest, a collarless shirt printed in forget-me-nots, and carried a gunny sack of tools. This he let fall beside the ditch gate, which was a new one, not quite finished, with cuttings of lumber all around. Frozen as I was, as soon as he opened his mouth I knew him for none of us, on account of his "Rs."

"Where's she for?" was what he said.

"Wh-wh-where's who for?"

"The vessel off there. Round the Horn?"

"Oh, mister!" (Where was there ever a man like that?) "Oh, m-m-mister!"

He sat down on the crossbar of the sluice, so his head was nearly level with mine. He had a large mouth and large ears, and leathery sunken cheeks that made the cheekbones stand out like knobs beneath his rather small grey eyes. The woman was still carrying on down in the fodder, the thirsty whine of a mosquito, itching at the nerves. The red crept up to his temples.

"Aw, shut up! Shut up!" He winced. He scowled. He hardened his neck. But then, ashamed that I had heard his muttering, and penitent, he fell to upbraiding me, if with no more than half a heart.

"You kids ought not to be into my melons; you know you oughtn't to."

Here was my chance. I began to pour out the tale of Flack's infamy. He distended the bellows of his cheeks as he listened.

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and as if to avoid my eyes turned his own away along the ditch. A crease appeared between them.

"Gone down!" he exclaimed.

At that I forgot injustice and remembered the ship. "*Sunk?*"

"No, no," he said in haste. "Down out of sight, I mean. Hull down under the skyline. Hatches battened, watches set, off soundings, snug at sea."

As Flack I can never forgive, Coffin I can never repay. Winking and snuffling, I picked up a remnant of two-by-six, and had my knife open and at it before I recollected in whose company I was. Then I made haste to hesitate.

"You going to use this, mister? I couldn't have it, I don't suppose?"

"Why not? Whittle ahead!" He got up, waved his arms at that swollen mosquito of a woman, and with a spurious energy pawed among his tools and got a hammer from his sack. He put a spike at random in the flat of a board and pounded. The blows rang loud down the bare declivity of the plain. They accomplished their purpose; his wife turned and went back towards the ranch buildings. Between the legs of the horses at a distance I saw the kids aroused and spying, their mouths open (I could imagine) to see me at my ease up there with that man. I stood out in better silhouette and went on hacking at my wood.

But already the spurious energy was failing. Halfway through a second spike the hammering ceased. The man, his shoulders fallen forward, sat looking down over his fence and across the dusty green rectangle of his acres and the rusty red cubes of his house and barns, and so I thought he would fall asleep there before he was through, he seemed so dull.

But then: "What you think you're doing there?" I heard from him, and found his attention shifted to me and to the bit of lumber on which I was trying, with my dull blade, to fashion a prow. "Shipbuilding, eh?" He looked funny. He flushed to his ears. He yanked his shoulders about, took his hammer-head from the dust, and hit the half-driven spike a blow. But after that he turned quickly, as if exasperated, and said, holding out a hand: "You'll never get a great ways that way, sonny. Lend it here a sec."

He fished a saw out of his bag, and in a minute he had given the block one end like a paling and another like half a hexagon. "See? You'd have taken all night to it, son. Your knife's none too sharp, anyhow." He whipped his own from a pocket. "Always keep mine in trim. Watch here."

He fell to rounding off the rough angles of the sawing, and his

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words were true. Longer and longer curled the pale feathers of the pine. A light waxed in his eyes. Sweat rolled down the gutters of his nose.

The sun stood at its hottest—half-past two. Half the cows were down, catching naps over their cuds. The pale blue mountains danced. A far stridor of grasshoppers, that was all the sound there was in a hundred miles, save when Coffin, wiping his sleeve across his face, clattered after something new inside his sack. A gouge. A pinch of brads. An end of pipe, like a napkin ring: he sawed the lead with the saw.

There I sat, mouth wide open. Water into wine! What's water into wine? Never before, never since, have I so really been to school; it still stands today as the vividest single piece of my education. To see a man take heterogeneous homely things, dead scraps, and from them bring out one thing alive and strange and brave and beautiful, his only magic his two hands. It was a hollow shell, finned with lead, bearing on a slender mast a sail cut off one of my father's handkerchiefs. So he took it, and lying, feet up and head down the embankment, sent it away on the muddy stream.

For a moment, after it had left his hand, it arrowed on with the impetus given it, across the lazy current. There was always an instant so, with all my ships, of aim and wilfulness, before they surrendered to the stream.

The stream came from the south. The wind blew thin from the south and west. Everything that was borne or blown went north. Any fool knew that.

When the boat the man had made before my eyes from a hanky, a pipe, and a butt of pine went east, not north, something happened to the cosmic scheme that can happen so disastrously only once. It was like seeing God caught off his guard.

The wind blew that shell, and blew it down, till the water was over and into it next second, every second I was sure. The current dragged it, and dragged it down, but with its head half meeting the stream and a tiny wake behind it, it would not *be* dragged down; amazing, it swam straight on across the High Line Ditch.

The man made sounds in his windpipe. "Go it!" His face grew crimson, if only with all the blood running down from his legs into his head. "Carry it! Hold her up to it! Drive her! Go on!" While I knelt and stared.

Nothing could wake me but the voyage's end. When that happened abruptly, in the thorns of a Russian thistle half submerged on the other shore, I jumped up from my knees in a fever

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and began to put off the straps of my overalls. But the man was ahead of me. Shoes and socks, pants and everything, into the water he went, waist-deep across, like Gulliver in the frontispiece.

Rescuing the creature from her spiny anchorage, he clambered up the bank, and I thought he wanted her and was afraid I would ask for her, he set off at such a pace upstream. But when he had gone thirty yards he stopped and calculated, moved a few more paces, got down on his stomach, and launched her on her return.

Now of course, with the wind on her other side, she came with the current, but all the same she came sailing, sailing. Northward drifting, but Westward Ho! And he had figured it so nicely that when she had won to within two arms' lengths of my coast, right there was the eddy reaching seaward from between the harbour heads of the ditch gate to bring her in. And in she came sweetly, mast spiring, cloth a-flutter in the lee of the sun-cracked foreland, her way dying, towards the mud.

But no mud was she to reach. In the nick of time I had grabbed a board and pressed it into the bank to take the tiny impact of her arrival. My heart turned over. If a man had made a ship, a boy had made a dock.

I had done more—I had made a seaport, a sudden city. By the time my strangest of ranchmen came thin-legged and squelching down my coast I had reared the first of my buildings, a cutting of two-by-four, tall at the dock's head, and he gave me a grin and blew out his cheeks.

"Got a custom-house already, eh, all ready to skin us alive?"

But immediately then he was dissatisfied. Heels higher than his head once more, down he came meddling.

"Not there. Over here at the *left* of the dock it stands, like so. The *street* goes up from *there*."

Either he was difficult or I was dumb. I had no more than started to make a furrow with my thumb where he said the street was, when you would have thought I was doing a crime, so roughly did he push me out.

"Broad!" He used the whole heel of his hand up the steep earth. "Wide and stinky." He cherished a file of sickly weeds. "Mahogany trees, poincianas, and silk-cottons. The black midges are hellishing all along under there. And here she bears sharp to the port hand; and here, look-a-here, it's the same as steps, she climbs so fast.

"And here at the turn—" He pawed behind him among the debris on the heights till he found a block. "Here's Papa Jacobi's. Know Papa Jacobi's, son?"

Elbows dug in the earth, the ranchman recollected. "It's a

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chandlery for one thing; it's a corner grocery; it's a bar; it's a sailors' post office, and a dancing hall. And next door, here, there's a Chinaman; and here's the church and the priest's house. And here's the square with the well, where the girls bring their pitchers. And here's the benches where the old bovs loaf, under the peppers, yarning till there's no end."

Swiftly from there, this way, that, zigzag, the street climbed. And suddenly, where it came out of the shadow cast by the heights beyond the harbour and into sunlight, there was another building set by magic, as big as a four-inch butt of unplaned two-by-four. And as suddenly, by another magic, I saw it had flagstones like a piazza before it, and iron tables and iron chairs, and above these a trellis, and over the trellis a vine sprawling, throwing shadow patterns, swollen flowers, wispy leaves.

Above that, then, there sprang a second building thrice as big. A high, blank, white wall was all I could make of that, and up this wall the line of dusk crept, racing. Yes, just that. Already, between one breath and another, the bank's shadow had overtaken the house with the trellis, and before my eyes it swallowed the one that was like a convent or a monastery. There in the city of inches the sun was setting in vivid miniature, and the dusk that ran up over the steep, wild, flower-hung port was as wide as the night of the world to me.

I do not know whether the ones I saw come rolling up that road were the same that Coffin saw; they hardly would be. But one of mine had a wooden leg, and one a hook for a hand, and one tall fellow built like a slab had two hearts tattooed on his bare right forearm, a blue one over a red one, and through both the scar of a knife wound that had pinned them together, I wonder if by chance. And all of them sang in a windy basso, things about Rio and about dead men and bottles of rum.

Rum they drank. Or wine they drank, lolling in the iron chairs, their elbows on the iron tables, from which the dusk had chased the flower shadows. Ale, brandy, Canary, Hollands, port. What they drank I cannot say. They ate queer fabulous fruits that the brown-skinned women brought them, mangoes, custard apples, avocado pears. At least, I think they did. There were dishes of stewed kid hot with peppers, I believe. And I know for sure they had cakes fried in oil, as thin as paper and as sweet as honey.

"As thin as paper," my strange alfalfa farmer played with his own words, rapt, waving his long legs against the sky. "And sweet as honey in the comb."

Far away and below in the bottom of the darkening harbour there is a confusion of faint sounds, creak of cases, thud of bales,

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boom of puncheons, where they are still heaving the cargo out of the hold of that ship of ours at dock. Mid-distant, other sounds, strange birds, laughter, an accordion, a guitar. The brown women are putting lamps in the glassless windows.

But above, beyond a thornbrake, a thinner, cooler light falls on the whitewashed wall without windows, and that is the light of the moon. But I have been mistaken. There is a shadow on the wall, the shadow of a sea rover with hearts on his arm, six feet and better in his boots, built like a slab. From his shadow another goes on up, narrow and rectangular, and that is a deep window full of darkness and barred with bars.

"What have they got you here for, my lovely? What's your name, my love?" The man's voice is wheedling, caressing. "Why don't you speak? Don't be scared of me. Can't you speak? Yes, but speak white, talk Christian, so I can understand. '*O, marinero, marinero!*' That all you can say? That won't tell me what's your name, what's your trouble, or how old you are? Damn, can't you tell me that much, even, by counting on these soft, white, silky little fingers I've got of yours?"

So there are hands in the dark between the bars. Never have I seen such hands again, so slim, so pale, so yearning.

"'*Marinero, marinero!*' Sure. But can't your sweet red lips say anything but that? Can't your big black eyes look anything else but 'O sailor, sailor!' so breathless, so scared, so sad?"

So there is a face in the dark behind the bars. Never have I seen such a face again, so heart-breaking in the tender oval of its beauty, so mysterious, so tragical, so pure in the sudden whiteness of the lightning, so young beyond the veil of the rain.

Rain? Lightning? Where is the moon? But after all, what's weather? What's time in the enchanted city of make-believe? Whether it's another night, another week, or another year?

"'*Marinero, marinero?*' Yes, your sailor's here."

Again the lightning cuts from cliff to cliff. The great pit full of houses and treetops, water and ships, is blacker after it. Down rolls the thunder like the tumbling of an empty cask. Down the wall rolls the rain.

"I can't see you, sweetheart, it's so dark. Where's your hands? Your lips? Damn these bars! Stand clear a second. Give me a hold on 'em. If I part the hands from my arms, I'll fetch 'em out, and the stone with 'em, and the whole damnation wall. And then we'll run. Run, you and me; you hear? What? '*O marinero!*' O sailor, sailor! So, that's why, is it—why you say it so scared and so sad? No, don't you worry, I'd never leave you. I'm done with voyaging for good and all. Where we'll go, you and me, is a thousand miles from the rotten salt. What we'll do, we'll get us

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a farm, a snug little place with cows and pigs and hens, and a tight little house, and you and me, like I've always wanted, away quiet inland, where I'll never have to set a top or pump bilge or eat maggots any more . . .

"Tight, eh? I'm drunk, you say? Now listen, pretty barmaid, put your blue eyes into this mug. Think a mug of beer that size could make me drunk on a cold night like this? So if you won't give me a kiss, give me another pint, while I tell you . . ."

A cold night like this? Pretty barmaid? But what's time, what's temperature, what's geography, what's sense, on the coasts of remembrance?

Where is the rain? The rain is there, over the slate roof and spattering on Cornish cobbles outside the public-house door, half sleet. Where are the fruity perfumes of the tropic seaport night? Blown away before the nose-pinching wind from a thousand Dickens chimney-pots with Kingsley sweeps in half of them. And the girl behind the bars? Gay pun! A girl behind a bar.

Never shall I see the like of that girl again, so entrancing in the red and white of her, so merry with her lips, so valiant with the blue-green eyes that have twin shadows in them, one of wisdom and one of wist. So beset in this loudness and beleaguered in this reek of men, yet so inviolate.

"'Sailor,' you say? 'Sailor, sailor,' you say, you've heard that guff before? Well, I'll tell you something; if you can't see the God's truth when you look a man between the eyes—no, hell, look at me! When I've hunted the world three times around to find a love like you, you'll leave those scabby lime-suckers wait a minute; you'll listen to me. Think I'm a boy, sweetheart, I don't know when I'm in love? Sailor? Hellnation, no! I'm done with sailoring, and that's sure. You come with me, and where we'll go we'll go a thousand miles from the rotten salt. What we'll do, we'll get a little farm, with cows and pigs and hens—sheer off o' me, you! Who you think you're shoving? *What?* You want a mouth put on to you big enough to suck a dozen limes at once? Yow! Swallow that! Wow! And that one! Guy! Kickin', eh? Knives, eh, now, you dirty Italians! You lousy Turks! Take a bite of the broken end of this bottle and see how—*God*!"

Where's the bar? Where's the maid? Where are the lights?

Where is any light at all? Where are we trying to slop and stumble to? What are we cursing and groaning for?

"Where we going, mister?"

"Down to the vessel. Down to the river. Down as fast as the devil'll let us. Down!"

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What are all these things that come up to hinder us, blind walls to hit us, gutters howling to grab our feet? And what's all that yelling coming down?

"Who's that after us, mister? What they calling to us for?"

But the sailor is heavy with rain and blood. "Get down. Get down and get aboard and beat 'em. Cast off. Go clear." His words are sodden in the rain; the gale blows them away.

All day it has been hot as a furnace on the plain of eastern Colorado, and cool in the mountain valleys to the west. The wind, thin a while ago, has a weight in it now. It rushes down between the iron walls of the Cornish estuary and out to grey the tops of the black Channel swells.

"Come on, son, heave aboard. We'll show 'em. We'll get clean of the stinking land and clear away."

But, "No-no!" I cried of a sudden, fairyland fading and greed coming in. "Looky the wind! Looky the ditch! It'll blow upside down and wreck itself—and that lead on its bottom—Good-bye?"

"Cast off! Shove off! Come about! Pay off! Fill away!"

"Aw, mister, naw! No foolin'. Listen, can't you hear 'em hollerin' to me? The herd's goin'. I got to go. Gi'me the boat; le'me have it; you don't want it. Oh, mister, le'me take it home! Naw! Catch it—*quick*!"

"There she fills, mate. Down your helm, though. Don't put us *over*!"

"Aw, mister; aw, say! Look what you gone and—"

"Drive, girl! Boil! Boil white water astern of us, and let 'em all go chase theirselves. Them and their land that's good for nothing but growing turnips and vegetables on. Who wants to be a turnip? When the whole world's ocean's ahead, and all the ports and sights. Clean of the stinkin' land, by—by—"

"Now look!"

"—by God!"

For an instant after she capsized in that mid-ditch gust and filled, the sloop's sail remained visible on the water, distended by the air caught beneath. So it circled, the dead plaything of daylight and matter-of-fact, once and once again, before the High Line swallowed it.

I could have wept. I could have howled: "Now see what you gone and done, all for nothin'!" But I dared not. The owner of one of the chasing voices had caught us. Ray Bleeker's face appeared above the bank, half hidden and half framed by the shipwrecked ranchman's quiet legs, and all one side of it was carmine with the ray of the declining sun.

"Hey, Dan, get a move!" He was full of bravado, for the

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other kids' benefit, but ready to duck and put heels to his invisible horse at need.

"Looky the time it is. We're startin' the herd home, if you're comin' with us."

Coffin got right end up on the embankment, working his joints as though they all had "cricks" in them. He rolled down his sleeves over the serpents, the anchors, and the red and blue hearts pinned together by a cicatrice. A dark colour ran up his cheeks.

"Yes, yes, yes, *yes*!"

The woman had come halfway up through the alfalfa this time. There she stood, submerged to the middle of her inflated wrapper, screeching, like a buoy lifting its note on a bright green vegetable sea.

The man took his hammer up and hit the neglected spike. The sound of his blows, flat and laggard, came after me only a little way down the hill of prickly pear and buffalo grass; the wind from the mountains was against it.

Ahead of me the wind blew the dust of the herd in a red streak to the north and east.

The kids kept at me. "Where you been to? What was he givin' you all that while?"

"He says we should keep out o' his melons, or we'll see."

★ ★ ★

ANSWERS to TALKING THROUGH OUR HATS

on page 20

1. *The Quangle Wangle, in "The Quangle Wangle's Hat," by Edward Lear.*
2. *Victoria Gayforth, in "Shadow Play," by Noel Coward, from "Tonight at 8.30."*
3. *Benedick, in "Much Ado about Nothing," by William Shakespeare.*
4. *Sherlock Holmes, in "The Boscombe Valley Mystery," by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, from "Adventures of Sherlock Holmes."*
5. *Rose, in Henry Austin Dobson's "Triolet."*
6. *Captain Flint, in "Treasure Island," by Robert Louis Stevenson.*
7. *Candida, in the play of that title by Bernard Shaw.*
8. *The Mad Hatter, in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," by Lewis Carroll.*

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SEEING EYE

He cackled as he nodded towards the cauldron

by E. C. ANSTEY

TO Timbela Moshi the watch-that-shines-in-the-dark was no novelty. It was one of those everyday proofs of the White Man's familiarity with the realm of the Magical with which a small boy in the service of one of the Lords-from-beyond-the-Seas became familiar. But never had he realized until that moment that the wonder could be effected by paint and a brush. The possibilities staggered his imagination.

"Will it truly bring the light that was dying to life again?" he asked fearfully.

Lieutenant Pinching Jones, known throughout the Fulassi and far down the Coast as the Weasel, laid the wrist-watch and compass he had been treating in the sunlight on the window ledge, and wiped his fingers on the draughtsman's rag.

"It will, Timbela. For half an hour we will leave it to drink in the light of the sun and hold it. Be careful and do not touch." He glanced smiling at the eager little face beside him and, with his insight into the African mind, added, "And remember—never touch the liquid. It is dangerous for such as you."

"And in half an hour shall I bring the watch to you?"

"Yes," said his master, "bring it to the Mess, and put away the compass; and moreover, in the absence of Corporal Adamoo lock the office, too, and bring me the key."

Timbela Moshi was puffed with importance. Had not Akela Gamba mocked his standing in the Intelligence Office and asserted with many evil words that he, Timbela, like Akela himself, was no more than a dressing-boy in his master's household? And now here he was in charge of the office itself and of its key, for the space of half an hour. If only Akela were to pass that way his satisfaction would run over.

Not only, however, did Akela pass, but on hearing of the responsible task assigned to Timbela he remained scoffingly unimpressed. "Thy Lord is but a Sub-Lord; mine is Captain of a Company. What men does thy Lord command save Corporal Adamoo and—thou!"

"My Lord," retorted Timbela heatedly, "takes orders from

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no man save the Colonel Lord himself. The Colonel Lord confers with my Lord in private and he—sometimes—consults with me . . . " a grandiloquent claim that had more truth than Akela could know. For Pinching Jones appreciated and often drew on Timbela's wide knowledge of the chit-chat of the market and the town.

Akela rolled in the dust in extravagant laughter.

" When did thy Captain Lord," continued Timbela, choking down his indignation, " ever take thee into his confidence? When didst thou ever hear news except in the servants' quarters? "

" When did thy Sub-Lord . . . ? " mimicked Akela.

Timbela swung the Sam Browne belt he was cleaning so suddenly that Akela escaped the vicious zip of the buckle only by a quick duck.

" So little dost thou know," Timbela went on, moving imperturbably towards his triumphant climax, " that without a doubt art thou ignorant that thy Captain Lord and his Company—and possibly thou, therefore, insignificant as thou art—march northwards tomorrow morning as escort to—*us*! "

Akela sat up, his face alight with astonishment, delight and some suspicion.

" Thou hast heard the talk of servants," he said accusingly.

Timbela waved in a lordly way towards a group of servants squatting in a circle in front of their huts twenty yards away. " Ask them."

Akela's query and his report of Timbela's statement were met with contempt, especially by the Weasel's head boy, Kwairo.

" Timbela Moshi is the son of the Lord of Liars himself and is a brat of impudence and of depravity. Does he pretend "—raising his voice—" that white men tell children their plans before their head servants? Should I be sitting here with no packing done if we were marching tomorrow? A truce to such folly! "

Timbela hastened to soothe the indignant major-domo whose hand could be heavy on a subordinate who offended him.

" The Eye Lord did not confide in me," he protested. " The news came to me—no matter how—and is true."

As he spoke, Corporal Adamoo appeared on the back verandah of the Weasel's room.

" Oh! Kwairo! " he called. " Hasten! The Lord calls! We march tomorrow morning—we and C Company."

For a moment the whole group looked at Timbela in amazed silence; but his triumph was short-lived. Kwairo sprang at the boy and boxed his ears angrily. " Son of a cow," he cried, " why

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idle when all is to be done? Thou imp of Eblis be gone and prepare the Lord's travelling furniture; and in future when news comes to thy listening ears it is to me thou shalt tell it and not to the worthless underling of another household."

Timbela fled with Akela's mocking laughter in his ears, and the germ of an idea sown in his fertile little brain. He would show Akela whether or not he was in the confidence of the Eye Lord.

The sudden departure of the Intelligence Officer of the Reserved Territories with such an escort as a whole Company was due to the receipt of news of a revival of the powerful Kusuma Juju. This repulsive sect had emerged from hiding, it was said, in the neighbourhood of the tiny village of Osaka, some three days' march to the north of Fulassi, and had begun again the practice of its horrible rites of murder, child torture, and cannibalism.

Timbela Moshi had himself heard a whispered reference to Osaka in the hut of an ancient priest behind the market-place, which he had duly reported to the Weasel; and he had been mopping up an overturned inkpot on the floor of the Intelligence Office when the Weasel and Machell, the Captain of C Company, had returned from an interview with the Big Colonel Lord and had discussed the hour of departure.

It was all very thrilling and the confirmation of the implications of the overheard whisper was comforting proof of the importance of his position. He was indeed one of the " Eyes " of his Lord. The problem was to convince the doubting Akela, without betraying a trust or impairing, in the estimation of the Weasel, that discretion which, so rare in a child of thirteen years, was counted by his master as one of his chief assets.

A Company of the W.A.F.F. on the march strung out along the narrow winding forest path was a formidable array. Pinching Jones was taking the opportunity to improve the sketchy map he possessed of the Osaka area. He had consequently brought a chronometer and sextant in the hope of getting an observation of the sun in the open spaces of the villages. Timbela, to his pride, carried the surveyor's poles and the chain.

It is not good for a chronometer to be carried on the head of a carrier, however smoothly he may walk. In order that the daily divergence from normal should be constant, the chronometer was carried fifteen miles daily, no march exceeding that distance, the quota being completed by the carrier walking round a measured distance in the village selected for the night's rest, after arrival.

This procedure caught the notice of Akela who was experiencing the delights of a first march with troops. " Perhaps the man

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is mad," he suggested, as the carrier ambled past them, "and cannot stop?"

Tents had already been erected; a guest house cleaned out for the officers, and the two boys were engaged in cleaning the boots and accoutrement of their masters, under the interested eyes of a bevy of naked village children.

"He is not mad," said Timbela aching to display his knowledge and to enhance the standing of his Lord. "It is the Lord's order. The box contains a powerful Juju, one of many which obey the great Eye Lord, and the Juju must travel a measured distance daily—neither more nor less."

"He travels no measured distance in Fulassi," muttered Akela.

"That, oh fool, is because in Fulassi he rests. Now he is awake."

"Is it a Juju that eats small children?" piped a tiny figure, squatting in the dust close in front of Timbela.

"No White Man's Juju eats small children," said Timbela sternly. "It is all good Juju."

"What does it do then?"

"It learns the truth," Timbela explained solemnly, "from the Sun; for it is one of the many eyes of the Great White Lord and *my* Lord is his High Priest."

The little crowd was deeply impressed.

"Is he who carries the box a priest too?" persisted the small child, who was more vocal than his companions.

"A very minor one," said Timbela carelessly. "We do not count him one of us."

"I saw thee carrying two black-and-white poles. Are they a Juju too?"

"No," Timbela admitted, "they are the badges of my office." Akela giggled; but Timbela frowned upon him so ferociously that he was silent.

"Not only is White Man's Juju good," he went on, "it is also exceedingly powerful. It is bad to interfere with it and *very* bad to disbelieve. In truth, the Sun would burn up him who mocked the Sun Juju. Thus!"

He rummaged in his master's haversack and produced a cigarette lighter. A clear flame sprang up as he pressed the catch and the lid flew open. The crowd gasped and drew back in alarm.

"So!" said Timbela gravely. "He who touches the White Man's gear is burned to an ash when he is not of the White Man's household."

Akela was familiar enough with cigarette lighters and that

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little comedy he brushed aside. But for the rest he was more impressed than he allowed Timbela to know. He had not seen survey instruments at close quarters before and the ritual of the march of the chronometer shook him.

That was not Timbela's talk; it was true for all men to see daily; and perhaps it would be well to show respect until he knew more. On the other hand, Timbela was far from satisfied at Akela's attitude to his own claims to a position of importance in the Intelligence Service, and he racked his brains to discover a method of impressing him and overcoming the scepticism his familiarity with white men and their gear had induced.

The idea came to him in the late afternoon of the third day's march from Fulassi. They had halted at Abassi, a small village only five miles from Osaka, at a point where the road forked. Leaving a guard on the baggage, the two officers had pushed on with two platoons along the wrong path for a short distance in order to disguise their intention of swooping on Osaka next day.

The Weasel took Corporal Adamoo with him and left Timbela with strict instructions to squat in the travellers' hut where the survey stores and Intelligence-Office box had been deposited and to see that no one interfered with them.

The servants had unpacked their masters' gear; erected the camp furniture; made the beds; placed water beside the portable wash-stands; laid out a change of clothing; and departed to prepare the evening meal. Timbela had the hut, built four-square round a central courtyard, to himself.

The Weasel had opened the office box to take out a notebook and had left it unlocked in one of the little rooms to be used for meals. Timbela, bored with sitting still, his fingers itching to do anything rather than nothing, peeped inside to see that all was in order. (There was a time, he reminded himself, when the top came off an ink bottle and much damage was done.) The peep was prolonged and merged into a closer examination, for the contents of the box, familiar though they were to him, were always intriguing.

The idea came to him slowly and insidiously until the full beauty of it burst upon him. Did he dare? Was the risk so great? The Eye Lord could not appear without the stir of returning troops giving ample warning. Kwairo was already engaged in filling his stomach. It would not take long, and the effect on Akela would be terrific.

The officers returned at dusk. Timbela, clad in his khaki shorts, to which he had been promoted to his great pride, with his loin-cloth wrapped turban-wise round his head, received them at the door of the hut.

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"The Lord's gear is safe," he assured his master gravely.

The Weasel glanced at the solemn little face and grunted. "What devilry have you been cooking up?" he asked shrewdly.

Timbela put the home-thrust aside with injured innocence. "Can I go to the evening meal now?"

"You can, Timbela. But stay at hand. Do not wander through the village. There are bad men nearby."

Timbela smiled covertly. Who would dare to touch a servant of the Eye Lord? Did not his garment proclaim his rank? He believed implicitly that, clad in his shorts with the Government mark on the waistband, he could pass unharmed from one end of Africa to the other.

How it happened the boys never quite knew. As the tropical dusk was falling swiftly, Timbela had led Akela away to the back of the huts which the officers and their following were occupying, planning to spring his grand surprise upon him in the shadows. Loin-cloths thrown over their mouths from behind choked their cries and they were picked up in men's arms and carried along a narrow twisting path until the stir of the village and the chatter of the men round the fires could no longer be heard.

When they were set once more on their feet and the gags removed, sheer horror froze them to silence. From words let fall by their captors, it was clear to the boys that they were in the hands of followers of the dreaded Kusuma Juju, the cult of torture, murder, and cannibalism.

With their hands tied behind them, they were led for an hour through the forest, stumbling in the dark over roots, the path lit fitfully by a torch carried in front. Timbela, shaking with terror, staggered along mechanically; but Akela was so petrified that he had almost to be carried when he fell under the blows and curses of his guard.

The light from a fire within a roughly stockaded enclosure flickered on the boughs of the giant cotton trees under which the undergrowth had been cleared for a space some twenty yards square. A gap so narrow that a man would have to squeeze his way through was the only entrance to the space inside. When the boys were pushed through roughly and saw the scene inside, Timbela shut his eyes and gave himself up for lost, while Akela, of weaker stuff, fainted from horror.

Facing them was an appalling figure of paint and grisly ornaments of bones and blood-stained rags, feathers, and skins, whose face was hidden behind a hideous grinning mask. A shining matchet was held in one hand, and in the other a skull mounted on a handle adorned with human finger-bones.

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Beside the seated figure, the High Priest of the cult, stood four naked assistants armed with leather whips and matchets. To one side was a fire over which a cauldron, hung by chains from a bough, was horribly suggestive of the ultimate fate of the prisoners. Round the walls of the stockade were ranged some twenty worshippers, greedy for the blood and flesh of the unholy sacrifices that were promised them.

The leader of the cut-throats who had brought them made an obeisance before the Priest. "Thy orders are obeyed. Two children are here, whelps of servants of the White Man."

Through the mask, the leer of bestial eyes gleamed in the light of the fire, and the thick lips of the sadistic madman who dominated the scene slobbered with lust.

"So! That is good. See, oh people who speak of the power of the White Man! What is it compared to the Juju of Kusuma? It cannot save its own pups. Strip that cur."

The shorts were torn off Timbela leaving him naked save for the cloth still wound turban-fashion round his head. The man who had taken the garment advanced into the firelight and held it up, pointing gleefully at the Government mark on the waist-band.

"See, Holy One! The White Man's sacred mark!"

"Bhamo!" The cry was wrung from the tongue-tied Timbela by the recognition of the man who had spoken—a man he knew—a friend of his when he was a carrier in Fulassi—a link with the world beyond this scene of horror. "Bhamo! It is I, Timbela."

Bhamo turned and looked at him with a horrible grin. "Ay! I know thee—worm of the White Man. I'll know thee better ere long—" and he cackled as he nodded towards the dreadful cauldron.

"What is this?" growled the Priest. "Who is the imp?"

"A slave of the 'I' Lord, oh Kusuma, who does his bidding and squirms between men to learn their secrets."

"Ho, ho, ho! That is good! Now thou knowest the secrets of Kusuma, brat, go tell thy master. Loose the hold on him." The brute chuckled horribly. Victims were always loosed when they were safely in the enclosure. It is more amusing to cut down a creature trying to flee than one struck to stone by terror.

The appearance of Bhamo, his treachery, the mention of his Eye Lord, all tended to loosen momentarily the spell of horror that had hitherto bound Timbela. Deep in his soul he had a trust and a reverence for the power of the White Man's Juju, the juju which had few priests and rites and no sacrifices, it was true, but which lay powerfully dormant behind all their doings.

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A glimmer of hope sprang to life far back in his mind. "There is no need to go," he stammered shrilly. "I am no slave of the White Lord. I am one of his Eyes!" And with the words which had slipped out, unpremeditated, came the flash of memory—the memory of what he had planned to do with Akela, what might still be done if he kept his head.

Kusuma foamed at the mouth. "One of his eyes, sayest thou? Then I shall pluck his eye out. Kill! Kill!"

The naked assassins beside him had started forward when Timbela's screaming voice stopped them. "It is too late! Through me the Eye Lord can see you now."

Some of the men ranged round the stockade drew in their breath sharply. Bhamo looked away, uneasily avoiding Timbela's eyes. His life with the White Men had left him profoundly impressed with their extraordinary powers in many directions. They were far away now, but one never knew! Perhaps it had been unwise to bring a servant of the White Lords here.

"What folly is this?" Kusuma bellowed. "The White Man is beyond the forest and it is dark. How can he see through this cub's eyes? Listen not, oh people! No juju comes before Kusuma. Kill!"

"It is true," cried Timbela, heartened by the effect of his words, "it is not with these eyes that the Great White Lord sees. It is through his own eye he has planted within me. With that he has seen all—the way here, the entrance, the faces of all here—and the Great White Lord never forgets."

The onlookers glanced fearfully over their shoulders; the executioners fell back a step, and Bhamo frankly turned his back. Timbela added boldly, "Perchance he has followed and is already outside with a hundred men."

Kusuma's fury burst all bounds. "Fools! Fools!" he screamed. "These are but words and they are lies, lies, lies! See my sword! I, Kusuma, shall show you the power of Kusuma over White Man's Juju."

"They are not lies!" cried Timbela, his heart in his mouth as the madman started up. "And I can prove it. The Great White Eye Lord has planted his eye within me as I have said. Behold!"

He whipped the cloth from round his head and for a brief moment the stillness of death reigned around. Then came the sharp gasp of frightened men, as they gazed horror-stricken at Timbela's forehead.

From its centre gleamed and winked in the dim light a great shining eye, roughly drawn in luminous paint and conveying by a happy chance a queerly impressive suggestion of all-seeing

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power, of omniscience, and of vision untrammelled by the darkness of night.

Doubtless, it would have shaken Akela as it had been meant to do. Here the effect was amazing. In a matter of seconds the audience had vanished, either through the entrance or over the walls: the executioners turned their backs on the baleful eye and scrambled like monkeys over the stockade.

Kusuma alone was left, stricken motionless. He gazed at the boy in amazement, as much as in fear. Here was a power greater than his own. He flung a cloth over his head to hide from the magic eye and was still fumbling at the fastenings of his mask when Timbela dragged Akela after him into the night outside.

The Weasel listened to Timbela's tale with mixed emotions. The danger in which the boys had stood sickened him and he thanked God for their escape. He had a deep affection for Timbela Moshi, imp though he was, and he was immensely proud of the boy's fortitude, presence of mind, and ingenuity in escaping from a predicament that must have seemed hopeless. But he knew from experience that he must praise with caution, for, after all, the whole trouble arose from disobedience.

"Did I not tell you to stay near at hand? And did I not forbid you to touch the liquid that shines?"

Timbela nodded, and looked forlorn, while his heart sang its triumph. Had not he, Timbela, put the great Kusuma Juju to shame and brought about the destruction of its sacrificial grove?

"Therefore, Timbela, do I punish thee—thus."

The Weasel cuffed the boy's skull with a rap which would have made a white man's head sing. Timbela, who scarcely felt it, squeezed a tear from his great black eyes from force of habit, and the song in his heart soared higher, for he knew beyond a doubt that he was forgiven.

"And now here is an order to the Quartermaster Lord for a pair of shorts to replace those lost and moreover a jersey such as the band-boys wear. Henceforth you are my Assistant Orderly. You may go now and"—with a twinkle—"tell Akela."

A jersey! *And* 'Sistant Wardli! Timbela's eyes shone as they had never shone before, as he achieved his first salute, before he ran from the hut.

★ ★ ★

I've given up reading books; I find it takes my mind off myself.

OSCAR LEVANT

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GENTLEMEN ARE COOKS

Cookery is become an art, a noble science; cooks are gentlemen

ROBERT BURTON

"Wiskyansoda," Stroganoff murmured absently.

"There isn't any," said the experienced Quill.

"No," said Stroganoff. "All right—then we have Russian tea." He pressed a bell. Nothing happened.

"Please don't trouble," Quill assured him. "I don't want any."

"But moi—I want it," said Stroganoff. "I want it very much." He put his finger on the bell-push and kept it there for fully half a minute.

"Poof," he said suddenly, "I remember now—it is out of order. N'importe—we use the telephone." Quill waited patiently while he wrestled with the obnoxious instrument.

"I want," he enunciated carefully, "three spoonfuls of the best Souchon. You will add des citrons cut mais très minces—some sugar—de l'eau bien bouillante and—"

"Russian tea," said a curt voice. "Oke!"

CARYL BRAHMS and S. J. SIMON,
A Bullet in the Ballet

Œuf à la Grecque

There was an old man of Thermopylae,
Who never did anything properly,
But they said, "If you choose, To boil eggs in your shoes,
You shall never remain in Thermopylae."

EDWARD LEAR

Papa on Pork

"Hartfield pork is not like any other pork—but still it is pork—and, my dear Emma, unless one could be sure of their making it into steaks, nicely fried, as ours are fried, without the smallest grease, and not roast it, for no stomach can bear roast pork—I think we had better send the leg—do you not think so, my dear?"

"My dear papa, I sent the whole hindquarter. I knew you

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would wish it. There will be the leg to be salted, you know, which is so very nice, and the loin to be dressed directly, in any manner they like."

"That's right, my dear, very right. I had not thought of it before, but that was the best way. They must not over-salt the leg; and then, if it is not over-salted, and if it is very thoroughly boiled, and eaten very moderately of, with a boiled turnip, and a little carrot or parsnip, I do not consider it unwholesome."

JANE AUSTEN, *Emma*, 1815

Sir Epicure Gets Ideas

We'll therefore go withal, my girl, and live
In a free state, where we will eat our mullets
Soused in high-country wines, sup pheasants' eggs,
And have our cockles boiled in silver shells;
Our shrimps to swim again, as when they lived,
In a rare butter made of dolphin's milk,
Whose cream does look like opals; and with these
Delicate meats set ourselves high for pleasure,
And take us down again, and then renew
Our youth and strength with drinking the elixir,
And so enjoy a perpetuity
Of life and lust!

BEN JONSON, *The Alchemist*, 1610

Early Pressure-Cookery?

The lodger took from his great trunk a kind of temple, shining as of polished silver, and placed it on the table.

Greatly interested in his proceedings, Mr. Swiveller watched him closely. Into one little chamber of this temple, he dropped an egg; into another some coffee; into a third a compact piece of raw steak from a neat tin case; into a fourth, he poured some water. Then with the aid of a phosphorus-box and some matches, he procured a light and applied it to a spirit-lamp which had a place of its own below the temple; then, he shut down the lids of all the little chambers; then he opened them: and then, by some wonderful and unseen agency, the steak was done, the egg was boiled, the coffee was accurately prepared, and his breakfast was ready.

CHARLES DICKENS, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1840

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Second Part of this new Novel

THE STORY OF ESTHER COSTELLO

★

Playing in a ruined cottage in Cloncraig, little Esther Costello had come upon a cache of gunpowder hidden during the Troubles. The massive shock of the subsequent explosion left her blind, deaf, and dumb. Mrs. Bannister, an attractive American visiting her native Irish village, rescues Esther from the appalling neglect of drunken parents and takes her to America. The doctors' utmost efforts fail. Through Barry Grant, the press becomes interested. Captivated by Esther's young Irish beauty, huge audiences gaze in devoted admiration as Mrs. Bannister communicates in deaf-and-dumb language with her lovely protégée. The appealing figure of Esther brings in vast sums for her own welfare and for the blind. This charitable existence is suddenly threatened by the return of Mrs. Bannister's—sinister, persuasive—husband.

CAPTAIN CHARLES BANNISTER . . . Mrs. Bannister was conscious of a slightly sick feeling as she saw him standing there—the small, elegant, soldierly man whom she had not seen for over ten years. A cursory glance told her that he had worn well—and that was somehow not reassuring, either.

She said: "Charles . . . What ever do you want here?"

"Well, Belle, old thing . . ." The bold eyes and the gin-croak voice were unaltered, too. "Just came round to look you up. Aren't you going to ask me in?"

"No."

He grinned, as if he had expected nothing better. "Good old Belle—" Then, before she could do anything, his arm came out and he pushed the door back, and suddenly he was over the threshold. "Change your mind," he said, his eyes sharp. "I was at the meeting tonight. I want to talk to you."

She followed him into the sitting-room, feeling weak and unarmed. There was something in his manner she could not place, notwithstanding all the copious experience of the past.

"Snug little place you've got here," he said, looking round him. His eyes wandered to the side-table and the silver tray. "Mind if I help myself?" She saw, with misgiving, that his

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★

by NICHOLAS MONSARRAT

suit, though well pressed, was frayed, and the heels of his shabby shoes worn far down. She shrugged.

"Have a drink if you like. You'll get nothing else from me."

"I was at the meeting," he repeated, as if this explained everything. "Very good show. And that girl's a stunner. You must have taken a dollar or two. Not for the first time, either."

"What's that to you?" Now he was facing her.

"I'm interested in the way people make money, that's all." When she did not answer, he said: "You've got to help me, Belle. Things haven't been going too well."

Things haven't been going too well . . . Captain Charles Bannister, the well-connected Englishman (second cousin of an earl) whom she had married twenty years before had been Mrs. Bannister's first and last excursion into matrimony. "Things haven't been going too well" might have been the post-lude of their wedding march: now it brought back vividly the small and large dishonesties of their joint past.

Charles Bannister, born a few years before the turn of the century, had been just old enough to take part in the First World War. Demobilized in 1919, he had kept his wartime rank (he had explained, once, the somewhat complicated reasoning by which he considered himself entitled to call himself Captain, although not a regular soldier); and it was as Captain Charles Bannister, a soldier with a slight limp, honourably discharged and now selling stocks and bonds on half-commission in New York, that she had met him, back in 1929. Though a self-reliant young woman of twenty-five, she was not equipped to withstand so talented an operator as this. They were married within three months.

She realized soon enough where her own inadequacy had led her; nor did it take her long to work out that 1929 was an exceptionally good year for a bond-salesman, however well connected, to marry a rich woman who still remained rich after the crash.

At the time of their marriage, Charles Bannister was deeply in debt: she was deeply in love; at first, the two things cancelled out. But that could not last long, since his rescue seemed to be a continuous process, and her love was not. She found it was not enough to redeem him from pawn when they were married—there was never a moment, subsequently, when he was completely solvent, in money or honour.

"Things haven't been going too well." How clearly she remembered that ominous, lowering phrase. It was the classic warning shot in his armoury, signifying trouble with tradesmen, trouble with his job, trouble with a woman, a horse, or a cheque.

What he did was never completely outside the law—not so far outside, that is, that she could not buy him free of entanglement.

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There was never an open scandal, simply a moment when he had to confide his embarrassment, when she paid the bill, and he swore to start afresh.

It was accompanied always by protestations of love and innocence, explanations which would have strained the credulity even of a very stupid woman (which Mrs. Bannister was not), and a display of impudent charm which served only to recall to her why she had been fool enough to marry him in the first place.

He still had the charm, she observed now, with a fresh return of misgiving. Covertly she watched him, while he sat at ease by her fireside. He had worn well, as she had already noticed: the clipped moustache, square tanned face, and grey temples were all as she remembered. Only the lines round the eyes, and the professional seller's smile, had hardened and deepened.

He must be over fifty now—fifty-two or three, in fact. He looked younger: he looked attractive still: he looked spry, confident, at ease with himself and the world. The fact that he was shabby and down at heel as well would, with most women, only serve to increase his attraction.

There was still that endearing English accent, too. It was one of the things she had fallen in love with, twenty years before, though it had palled at least as swiftly as his other assets. "Dahling, I a-dawe you!" was one thing, particularly on a honeymoon: "Dahling, lend me a fivah!" was, particularly on a honeymoon, something else again.

Now, uncertain and ill at ease, she asked: "What have you been doing? Were you in the war?"

"Of course I was!" He sounded astonished, even hurt: it was very well done. "What did you think?"

"You know damned well what I thought."

He chose to ignore this. "I was in the Dunkirk show, naturally. Then North Africa and Italy. Then across the Rhine."

"Fighting?"

"Intelligence. I was in the Army of Occupation for a bit, too. That was a really grand show."

"What happened?" His face clouded.

"There was a bit of a mix-up, actually," he confessed, as if he could hardly credit the fact. "Some young fellow made a hash of the mess-accounts. I had to straighten them out."

"*You* did?"

"Yes. The trouble was, I took the responsibility."

"What happened, Charles?"

"They moved me on."

"They moved me on." That was another phrase straight out of the past. With Charles Bannister, she had found, one was bound to keep moving on, always travelling away from some crisis or near-scandal, towards the certain horizon of another. They had moved on from America, soon after the honeymoon, because of some quarrel (not fully explained) with the broking firm for which

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he worked. They moved on from England, not once but many times: they were kept moving particularly briskly on the Continent—moving from houses, from hotels, from casinos and bridge-clubs.

There was nothing blameable about these crises, naturally: it was never anyone's fault; there was just some sort of misunderstanding, never clearly defined, followed by a bleak session with an estate agent, a book-maker, a club secretary, a firm-faced hotel manager—and they moved on once more.

She paid all the time, of course—but with Charles Bannister, it seemed, paying was never enough. One had to pay, *and* get out; that was usually insisted on.

There was the small scandal with the hat-check girl who turned out to be married: there was the slightly larger affair, involving the doped racehorse at Newmarket; there was the really resounding row that stretched right down to South Africa, and the Indian who had diamonds to sell, and the man from Kimberley who was the go-between, and the police who, unaccountably, swooped down on them at Cannes. . . . As usual, nothing could *quite* be proved; as usual, she paid, and they moved on.

The climax came in London, just before the war; the climax was Lady Julia Wroy.

By this time, Charles Bannister no longer pretended to keep office hours or do any work; she made him an allowance, and they lived in a flat in Mayfair for which, of course, she paid the rent.

Now, after ten disastrous years, they were near to separation: he was really costing too much, there had been too many scenes and crises, too many people were sorry for her, she had lost too many friends. Even their rare nuptial contacts had taken on the same aspect of exploitation: it seemed to cost several hundred pounds every time she went to bed with him.

What tipped the balance against him, and his resilient, rubber good-humour, and his tailored insolvency, and the whole sordid chain of intrigue and lying, was, surprisingly, a woman.

It was surprising because women had never been a specially destructive element in their marriage. But there was something in the Lady Julia Wroy episode which finally stuck in her throat. It was not the fact that he was openly sleeping with this indolent young whore; there had been a number of such incidents, and flagrant affairs of this kind were apparently fashionable in the world in which Charles Bannister lived. It was the fact that he expected Mrs. Bannister to foot the bill for it.

When she refused—since the girl was very expensive—he embarked on a course of open theft. He pledged her credit at hotels and restaurants. He converted the money for the rent to his own bank-account. He took the servants' wages from her purse. He ran up a series of bills, for food, drink, clothes, and jewellery, which unloosed upon their flat a hideous succession of duns and creditors.

Once they had encountered each other, in different parties, at

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a night club. The girl was sitting close by his side, almost in his lap—a half-dressed, haggard blonde with a face like a bored skull. He had waved gaily, and raised his champagne glass towards her.

Some time after he had left, an envelope was presented to her, "with Captain Bannister's compliments." It was his bill.

Finally, he returned to the flat one night, wept into his whisky, begged for her forgiveness, made love to her until, spent and drowsy, she fell asleep, then took from her jewel-case a diamond bracelet worth fifteen thousand dollars, and left for Antibes—with Lady Julia.

She might have survived even this grotesque betrayal, if it had not been for a single sentence, overheard at a party in London. The comment made her long humiliation spill over at last.

"Poor Belle," this was what she heard, when she paused at the entrance to the room; "poor Belle—she must be going through hell with Charles."

"Don't be silly, darling!" said the second voice. "She's *American*—it's not like ordinary people."

That had been ten years ago, just before the war. This time, she had paid, and herself moved on, alone. She had not seen or heard of him again, until tonight.

—

Now she moved restlessly, frowning at her thoughts, and said: "What are you doing in America?"

He gestured with an easy hand. "Looking round. The old country's absolutely played out, Belle. You wouldn't recognize it. Hopeless. I thought I'd try my luck over here."

She said, again: "You'll get nothing out of me. Let's have that straight, for a start."

"I was at your meeting tonight." Once more it sounded as though the words explained everything to him, and should do the same for her. After a moment he added, in a different voice: "You're on to a pretty good thing there, old girl."

She looked up, to find him staring at her admiringly. She felt weakened by his presence. For two cents, she thought, he'd climb into bed with me, even now. It was funny to see him across the fireplace again, after all these years. He could still make her feel like a woman—damn him. She straightened up.

"It's not a 'good thing' at all," she answered tartly. "I've been training Esther Costello, and looking after her, for years, and now we collect money for the blind. It's not one of your damned rackets, if that's what you're thinking."

"Of course not, Belle. I know you wouldn't dream of it." But there was little conviction in his voice: it sounded as though he wanted to wink at her.

He rose, and crossed to the side-table, to pour another drink. From there, with his back towards her, he asked suddenly: "Where's all the money, Belle?"

"What money?"

"The money you've collected during the past year or so."

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She was feeling weak again. "It's in a fund."

"A trust fund?."

"No."

"Who administers it?"

"I do."

He still kept his back turned towards her. It made his questioning seem detached and judicial, far more unnerving than if he had faced her directly.

"Is it in her name?"

"No. She's blind and deaf and dumb. How could she operate a bank-account?"

"In fact, it's in yours?"

"Yes."

At that he turned to face her once more. His look, she saw, had lost none of its admiration. He said, slyly: "That sounds a very satisfactory arrangement."

She wished she could lose her temper, but that had never been any use with Charles Bannister. The warm room, and the three drinks, and the man a few feet from her seemed to be combining to rob her of ten years of self-sufficiency. She could hardly recognize her own voice as she answered him.

"I don't hold on to the money. Now and then I distribute some of it. I gave a donation of ten thousand dollars to the blind, only last week."

He nodded, walking forward, holding his fresh drink carefully. "I read about it . . . I hope you weren't overdoing things . . . What percentage was it?"

"Percentage of what?"

"Of the total takings."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Oh yes, you do." He grinned suddenly, intimately: it took her back many years, to half a dozen tainted incidents. "Come off it, Belle! I know you're on to a good thing. I just want to make it a better one."

They were still talking, two hours and many drinks later. Charles Bannister, she found, had altered not at all: he was still as persuasive, as self-confident, and as completely amoral as he had ever been.

For one thing, he simply would not believe that Mrs. Bannister was not running Esther for her own personal profit; for another, he refused to agree that anything he might have done in the past could possibly come between himself and his lawful wife. There was about him, in spite of his shabby clothes, a special blend of charm, impudence, and determination, which aided both these arguments; and the whisky, Mrs. Bannister realized, was not greatly helping her to establish anything to the contrary.

The fire settled lower in the grate: outside, the traffic noises along Commonwealth Avenue died to nothing. Here, waylaid in her own home by a man she had loved long ago, she battled for a

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sane outcome to an absurd and crucial situation. But as the time went by, she battled less and less effectively.

Charles Bannister had altogether too much on his side. He had the past, which, for all its iniquity, had included also the indelible tenderness of first love: he had the present, summed up in the brash confidence of an attractive man; and he had the future, which appeared to involve, for good measure, a guarantee of blackmail.

Alcohol, fear, and her own silly heart were making these things irresistible.

"Don't tell me," he said authoritatively at one point, when they were still arguing about her good intentions: "don't tell me that you set out on this money-making effort with the idea of turning everything over to charity. I'll lay you anything you like that you've done nothing of the sort. You said yourself that you've been building up a bank-balance. You must have been spending a lot of the money, too."

"Of course, there've been expenses," she said defensively. "Esther needs all sorts of things, all the time—food and clothes and medical treatment. There were the training fees at the blind school, as well as all these operations and tests, for months and months, when we first arrived. I'm entitled to deduct for that sort of thing."

Even as she spoke, she heard an echo of his own wheedling voice, out of the past, saying: "But *dahling*, I only *borrowed* it."

"Of course you're entitled!" Swiftly he changed his ground. "You're entitled to a suitable standard of living, and a decent return for all the trouble you've taken with Esther. That's only fair. The question is, of course"—he hesitated, delicately—"how *much* you're entitled to, for all you've done for her, and the way it's changed your whole life. *I* maintain"—here he sounded incredibly honest and fair-minded—"*I* maintain that you're entitled to a hell of a lot. Why, you've given up everything for her!"

"I don't want a hell of a lot."

"But you haven't exactly stinted yourself, even now, have you?" He looked round the room, touched the arm of his chair, sniffed at his drink, all in one appraising gesture. "All this is snug enough, Belle."

"I've had 'all this' for years," she said scornfully. "Otherwise you wouldn't have married me."

"You mean there've been no improvements?" he countered. "Are you telling me you *haven't* stepped things up since Esther came along?"

Mrs. Bannister was silent.

"Of course you have! You lost quite a bit of money during and after the war, didn't you?" he went on, maddeningly shrewd. "I don't say you went broke, or anything like it, but things certainly weren't what they used to be—investments in the Far East—that sort of thing. Now you're building up again—and

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good luck to you, I say. But what I maintain is that you could do a lot better—and you deserve to."

"How?" She knew she should never have asked him such a question, which seemed to make her an accomplice with one single syllable; but she was intrigued by the idea he had produced. She honestly did not think that she had done so badly.

He brightened. "It just needs organizing, that's all. We want to make Esther a world figure, not simply a home-town celebrity. Just think what we could do with national and international publicity, with world tours instead of just local ones. There's no limit to it. She's a winner, that girl—a real winner! But she needs handling properly, on a really big scale."

She said: "Freshen up my drink again, will you?" And then: "No, Charles—I don't like the idea and I don't want to do it."

"Why not?"

"It's too much trouble, for one thing."

"*I'll* look after that."

"That's what I'm afraid of!" she exclaimed, annoyed. "Why should I agree to any of this, just to give you an easy living? That's all it amounts to."

"I hate to see a good idea going to waste."

"You hate to let slip a chance of getting money for nothing."

He grinned. "It's the same thing."

Mrs. Bannister shook her head. "We still talk a different language, you and I. No, Charles," she said again: "I don't want to make any changes. I'm doing very well as it is."

"Yes, indeed." There was so sudden an alteration of tone and inflection in those two drawled words that she looked up, to find him staring at her fixedly.

"That's exactly what people are going to say."

"What do you mean?"

"That you're doing very well as it is." It was extraordinary how significant, how evil her own words sounded, when Charles Bannister got to work on them. "Mrs. Bannister doing very well—it'll make a good headline."

"There'll be no headlines," she said, secretly appalled. "There's no occasion for them."

"I'll make the occasion."

The thing that had been in his manner from the very beginning, the lurking thing in the background which she had not identified, now emerged into the open. She recognized it at once: it was a threat, a completely confident threat.

"A word or two in the right quarter could make a lot of difference to you. Even a hint that you're holding back some of this money—" he gestured. "It would kill you—stone-dead."

"They'd never believe you."

"They'd never believe *you*—unless you showed all the accounts, and gave the full figures. Are you prepared to do that? Can you stand an investigation? You know damned well you can't!

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You're breaking every law in the States! Mrs. Bannister doing very well—" he repeated her fatal phrase, with yet more crude sarcasm. "Gives nearly ten per cent to charity, keeps rest."

His voice, aping a newspaper report, might have been funny if it had not mirrored so brutally her encroaching terror.

"You wouldn't dare."

He put the fresh drink down beside her without answering: then he straightened up slowly, standing above her with no trace either of humour or of weakness in his face.

"There are a lot of things I'll dare, if you don't see this thing my way, and do as I want. The real truth about the Esther Costello donations—that's one good story. *I'm* another."

"You?"

"Yes. Mrs. Bannister's husband returns." Again that absurd newspaper caricature, which once more clawed at her heart. "Mystery Englishman surprised by wife's activities. *Sues for divorce.*"

"What? You must be crazy!"

"Sues for divorce," he repeated. "The scandal will finish you. You know it only needs to be mentioned—like the rumour about swindling. And there's another thing."

He paused, so that she was forced to look up at him again, fearful of what more could be coming, wondering how high he would build his wall of blackmail before it broke and overwhelmed her. She knew from the past that he would use any weapon to get what he wanted: the deadly knowledge stole away all her strength.

"There's another thing." The smile on his face was the smile of years ago—sly, vulpine, wholly corrupt. "America isn't the only place I've travelled to, since the war. I was in Ireland, a couple of months ago. Looking at some horses. D'you know where I landed up?"

"No." But she did know.

"Cloncraig," he said.

"What of it?"

He came straight to the point. "The Costello parents are still there, both of them. They've heard about Esther, though they don't know how to get in touch with her. They'd like to see her. They'd like—" his fingers flickered—"they'd like a cut."

"They've absolutely no right to it." For some reason this last piece of news shook her as nothing else had been able to: the whole carefully cherished structure of herself and Esther seemed on the verge of toppling in ruins. "They gave up all claims to her, years ago."

"Did they?"

"Of course they did."

"In writing?"

She was silent.

"You never adopted her, did you? She's still their child, legally. If she's earning money"—he smiled briefly, mirthlessly—"which wouldn't be very hard to prove—they're entitled to a

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share of it. They're very poor," he went on, with loathsome concern. "The law courts *love* poor people."

"But I've done all the work." Already her voice was nearly breaking with despair. "I've taken all the trouble."

"Too bad . . . But it's been a labour of love, surely, Belle? In fact, I'm almost sure you said so once, in a newspaper interview. People remember these things. You know, you'd better have another drink."

As he said that, and turned from her, lifting the pressure of his own accord, she was suddenly and totally wearied of the whole thing. This was a battle she knew she could not win. It was true that a single breath of scandal—whether about Esther or the money or her own marriage—would be enough to destroy everything: and the idea of Esther's parents coming on the scene again was the most desolate prospect of all.

Charles had all the cards—and he had something else, too. She knew now, with a kind of hopeless self-derision, that he was not "a man she had loved long ago:" in spite of the ruinous past, she was still in love with him.

While he was busy at the side-table, she said, unexpectedly, soberly: "Why are you such a bad man, Charles? I never did you any harm."

She had thought that this would make him pause, but he answered immediately: "I've told you, Belle." His back, towards her again, gave his voice reason and normality, against all the known facts.

"I just want you to make the most of this girl. She's a goldmine. We can make a lot of money for ourselves—*and* for the blind. That's why I was—putting the pressure on."

In spite of herself, the word "was" fell like a caress, promising her a respite from all threats, all danger, as soon as she agreed to what he wanted.

"But you must have planned it all—a long time ago."

He shook his head. "No. Cloncraig was a pure coincidence: I really was there to look at some horses. Then I heard about you and Esther, and I travelled over here to see what the form was. It was all as simple as that."

She realized that, tactically speaking, his quiet, seemingly honest tone was a brilliant variation: it alternated with his recent threats as perfectly as a wave that breaks and then recedes completing a natural pattern, leaving the sand bare and white for the next footprint. She realized, too, how confident he was, and how well equipped to deal with her at any level. She realized that she had no weapons left: he could destroy her if he wanted to, and he would do so if she stood in his way, since he had nothing to lose thereby. The only thing left to discuss was terms.

But he was before her, even there. He said, suddenly, coaxingly: "You're still a damned good-looking woman, Belle."

"Still" was not the ideal word, but it did not wholly spoil this sentence. She knew now that the tide was running hopelessly

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against her. He could ring the changes too expertly: the whisky, the man, the discarded threats were weaving a chain that could have only one end. She felt herself sinking into a haze of soft relief, becoming a woman again, abandoning everything to him.

As he came towards her, she said: "Being good-looking never did me much good, where you were concerned."

"I've learned my lesson." His voice was gentle, and his next words fell into place as aptly and inevitably as that receding wave.

"How about giving it another try, Belle?"

"But what about the girl?" She was getting mixed up, caught between the battle she had just lost, and the swift change of feeling that was putting the two of them on a plane of sensual accord.

"I'll take care of that."

"You'll spoil it all if you overdo it."

"I won't overdo anything."

She sighed. "It's a long time since we've been together like this."

"I won't overdo anything."

THE things they now did to Esther Costello would not have disgraced a twilight advertising agency whose executives, competing for a new account, were determined to leave no avenue unexplored, no stone unthrown, no throat uncut.

With Captain Charles Bannister—no stranger to personal exploitation—in charge, they got to work on Esther with at least as much energy, determination, and optimism as had the doctors, when she first arrived in America. Happily for them, personal exploitation proved a much more exact science than medicine, where Esther was concerned.

When Charles Bannister said that he would not overdo things, he had been completely sincere: he had meant, of course, that he would be careful not to move too fast, not that there was any sort of ceiling to his ambitions. Mrs. Bannister should have known this: indeed, in her more sober and reflective moments, she *did* know it; but at the beginning, secure and ecstatic in an Indian summer of love which, at the age of forty-six, she thought she could no longer attain, she was caught off her guard—and after that it was too late.

Charles Bannister was a skilful lover: it was the sort of thing he had been paid to be, for very many years; and in the present case he applied his skill long enough to establish himself firmly in the saddle. Once there, once Mrs. Bannister was committed to his plans for a bigger and better Esther Costello, there was no retrieving the situation.

Whenever she protested, in the early days, against some particular extravagance, he threatened—though always elegantly—to withdraw his favours. Soon there was no use in her protesting anyway, since the machine had started turning and could not be stopped;

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and presently there were no favours to withdraw, because the Indian summer had burnt itself out, and would never return.

But to begin with, she had no great suspicion in her mind that Charles Bannister would overstep the mark: chance had rescued him from penury, and it seemed he must realize that Esther Costello could give them both a substantial living, without too gross an effort on his part. In fact, against all the odds, she continued to trust him.

Even when he was first introduced to Esther, and, surveying her admiringly, had said: "She's a damned attractive girl—wish I were a few years younger!" Mrs. Bannister had not got beyond thinking: "Oh no—he wouldn't do *that*." Embalmed in unexpected love, she had forgotten how many times she had used these precise words in the past, and how many times the outcome had astonished and shamed her.

There were plenty of ghosts for her to call on, if she cared to, a whole gallery of hideous memories; but she was blind to them at the beginning, and by the time she awoke to reality, reality had won itself too long a start.

First, said Charles, when they were at the planning stage, first there was some ground to be cleared.

"We must definitely fix the parents," he told her. "The mother's a stupid peasant, the father's a drunk; but they *have* got a nuisance value. We don't want some crooked Irish lawyer ferreting about, later on . . . We'd better adopt the girl, formally."

"Will they agree to that?" she asked.

He shrugged. "It's bound to cost a bit . . . But I know a man in Dublin who can fix it up for us. He'll talk them into accepting a small pension, in return for giving up all rights to the girl. We can't afford any mistakes, once we get properly under way."

Thus it was arranged; and the "man in Dublin" presently reported that the Costello parents had agreed to Esther's being legally adopted. They didn't seem to have much idea, he said, of what the girl was really worth. When this was satisfactorily disposed of, Charles Bannister touched on his own position.

"We'd better tell people," he suggested, "that I was in the war, and then I had some British Government job that took me travelling round the world. Now that's finished with, and so we're together again."

"What about Esther?" said Mrs. Bannister. "She's liable to be jealous."

"You needn't go into any details, with her," he answered. "Just say that I'm a friend of yours, and that I'm helping you with general organization. She'll soon get used to my being around."

"But she'll know——" Mrs. Bannister hesitated. "She'll know that you're living here—and everything."

He grinned. "She needn't know about *everything*," he said. Explain it to her how you like. Perhaps it might be better to tell

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her the truth about us—some of the truth," he amended. "As long as she realizes that I'm in charge of things, helping the two of you to organize yourselves.

"And," he went on, less agreeably, "as long as everyone else realizes it. I want to clear the ground, and then get to work."

The precise way in which he would "get to work" was the subject of many discussions between them: in those simpler days, she accepted most of his ideas without argument. In some ways, she encouraged him to plan extensions to their activities; she cherished the vague idea that the busier he was, the less likely he was to get into trouble.

"We want to raise the level of the whole thing," he said once. "Esther's pretty well known in the east, already; we want to extend the lectures and the personal appearances, till she can go anywhere, coast to coast, and be sure of a hearing. Then we'll think about a world tour."

"But it can't last for ever," said Mrs. Bannister doubtfully. "Not on those lines. People will lose interest, unless it's tied to something definite. We ought to make it a million-dollar appeal, or a hospital for the blind, or something like that."

"I'm working on that," he told her briskly. "But we don't want to fix any definite sum, and we don't want a specific building, either—otherwise we run out of attractions as soon as we've reached our target. We want something big but vague—something like an Esther Costello Corporation. It will collect money for the blind—and we'll have a free hand to allocate the money ourselves."

"We'll need some other people, to make it look right," said Mrs. Bannister. "The public like a lot of names."

"One can always buy names," he said. "Take a look at the cosmetic advertisements. As long as we retain effective control, it doesn't matter how many guinea-pigs there are on the board."

"Church people are a good bet," she said, after a pause, prepared to be helpful. "In fact, we might give the whole thing a religious angle. It still draws the crowds in America—*and* the confidence."

He shook his head. "Better keep it vague—like the Corporation itself. It gives us a lot more scope. Don't forget," he added, "that she's got to have a *universal* appeal."

"It's a big job, however you handle it," Mrs. Bannister commented. "Are you still sure you want to go ahead with it, Charles?"

"Yes," he answered. "That's one thing I am sure of."

In those early days, they were on a level plane of intention. But it was not long before she was left far behind, whence even her protests could not reach him.

They started with a tour to the west coast; it was an obvious extension of their activities in the east, and they had, to guide them, a path already well beaten by boxers, burlesque artists, religious sectarians, and lecturers on English literature in the

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seventeenth century. Their westward tour lasted over three months, and they were fortunate in many things: in the weather, the absence of other attractions, and the fact that, though this was the farthest from home that Esther had ever travelled, her fame had already preceded her.

It developed into a triumphal progress, covering over twenty major towns and many hundreds of miles; wherever they went, Charles Bannister, travelling ahead, had been able to arrange meetings, demonstrations, radio broadcasts, TV appearances—all the accompaniments that buttress fame.

His task was not difficult, since most people on their journey had heard of Esther, most editors were ready to give her space, most local charitable bodies were eager to co-operate. By now, Esther Costello had caught on, and the Esther Costello Guild had won itself a niche in the American mind that ensured for it, and for her, an uncritical welcome and a solid body of public support.

The Bannisters had thought it best to regularize (in their own sense) Esther's position, before they set out on their tour; and the Esther Costello Guild was already a reality. Besides themselves, they had co-opted to the board of trustees the kind of people who invited the confidence of the simple and spiked the guns of the inquisitive: the Guild, as set out on its letter-headings and throw-away leaflets, looked good from every angle save that of a chartered accountant.

The Board, in addition to the Bannisters (who remained in full control), consisted of four other advisory members. They were a bachelor earl, somewhat discredited in England; a Mid-Western bishop, ill-advised by an ambitious chaplain; a ranking city politician who commanded a large and sympathetic local following; and an old-time aviatrix, over whose wandering mind Charles Bannister had, at some crucial moment in the past, established an effective hold.

With this crew to hallow its activities, the Esther Costello Guild declared itself open for business. Business, from the very beginning, was brisk; and it gathered momentum until, by the time they reached California, traditional home of lunatic causes, they were a riotous and golden success. California took them to its heart; and in particular, Hollywood, seeming to recognize in Esther someone in its own idiom, a manufactured creature whose appearance could set the crowds gaping—Hollywood accorded them the full treatment.

It was scarcely flattering to be thus identified, but it produced notable results. They held a series of five public meetings, all crowded out and all conspicuously profitable. Esther was interviewed continuously, via Mrs. Bannister. She signed autographs, and her guided hand was the feature photograph on scores of front pages. She toured the film studios, and met selected film stars. ("How terrible!" said one of these, struck by Esther's basic tragedy. "She's never seen any of my pictures.")

The Hollywood climax, in fact, produced immediate dividends,

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as far as money and publicity were concerned. But in particular, it produced, in Charles Bannister's hotel suite, one April evening, a man called Jack Lett.

Charles Bannister was alone, and rather tired, when the caller's card was brought to him; Esther and Mrs. Bannister had already gone to bed, and he was thinking of doing the same, aided by a highball long and strong enough to serve for half a dozen nightcaps.

Jack Lett—Novelties, proclaimed the card, in an unusual form of script reminiscent of second-century Chinese: the name meant nothing to him, and the word novelties conjured up a vision of coloured paper hats with "Kiss and Tell" inscribed upon the brim. He said to the waiting page-boy: "Send him up," and added a touch more whisky to his highball. He would go to bed in half an hour instead of a quarter.

He did not go to bed in half an hour, or anything like it. Jack Lett was not that kind of man, and the occasion proved to be not that sort of occasion.

The visitor who presently shouldered his way into the room was a tough, bustling, stocky character who looked like a salesman's dream of himself next year. He was small, square, olive-skinned, alert: he carried, clenched in one over-burdened hand, two fat brief-cases, and a green hat with a curly and aggressive brim.

He came forward briskly, almost running, the other hand outstretched, and said: "Captain Bannister?" His voice was like his hand—outstretched to clasp the customer. "Hope you don't mind my butting in this way—I wanted to meet the brains of the organization!"

Charles Bannister frowned. This was the sort of moment when he reminded himself that, but for a trifling irregularity, he might have been commissioned in a Guards' regiment. He said coldly: "I'm Captain Bannister, yes. What can I do for you?"

"It's the other way around, Captain."

Not put out by this chilly greeting, the man laid down his hat, and the brief-cases, and smiled at Charles Bannister as if the latter had just paid him some extravagant kind of compliment. His voice—harsh and yet winning, warm as a patch of carpet in the sun—filled the hotel room. "It's what *I* can do for *you* . . . I'm Jack Lett. You've seen my card. It says novelties, and it means just that." His hand darted out, seized the nearest brief-case, and drew something from it. "Now just tell me how you like this."

"This" was an ornament made of coloured plastic. It had the same shape as the trio of monkeys—one guarding its eyes, one its ears, one its mouth—familiar to most people over the cautionary directive, "Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil." But the three figures were not monkeys: they were human, and female; and the face of each was a very fair imitation of Esther's. At the base of the ornament was the legend: *Be Like Esther Costello.*

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In the pause that followed, Jack Lett said: "It's just an idea, Captain, I've got lots more like it. I wanted to try this one for size."

In spite of himself, Charles Bannister could not help feeling a trifle sick. He was ready to agree that the ornament was, in a way, simply a novelty, a commercial demonstration of Esther Costello's known personality; but there was something in the three figures, and the hands over the eyes, ears, and mouth, which seemed an indecent comment upon her.

Aware of his hesitation, Jack Lett was already talking fast. "I've got plenty more ideas like it. You needn't take this one. I think we might do business. That little girl of yours—" he raised his fingers, and kissed them, like a head-waiter over the sauce—"she's a natural. I've been to all your meetings. Everybody's talking about her. You want to cash in, Captain—in a dignified way, of course."

"Dignified," repeated Charles Bannister, looking at the three figures. And then: "You had this specially made—have you got a factory, or what?"

Jack Lett shook his head. "No, sir. I deal in ideas. I had it made by a friend of mine, because I wanted to illustrate an idea for you. I've got lots more. I thought we could do some business together. Are you interested?"

"I haven't thought of it," said Charles Bannister, untruthfully. "All we've done so far is to have these lectures and demonstrations—raising money for the blind."

Jack Lett nodded energetically. "And very fine work, too," he said. "I haven't yet had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Bannister, but it was clear to me, from watching her, that she's a fine woman, a deeply religious woman, devoted to the interests of this child."

"Yes, indeed," said Charles Bannister.

"Then we can do business . . . It's fine work," he repeated, "but there's never any harm in building up a side-line. It always helps with the publicity." His hand darted into the brief-case again. "Have a look at this."

This was a large toy dog, made of brown felt—an Alsatian. Round its neck was a collar with the words: *Esther Costello's Guide Dog*.

"It barks and whines," said Jack Lett. "We could sell a million." He seemed to be bursting out of his clothes at the thought. "Lots of money for the blind, and a little for me. I thought up a game, too," he said, and plunged down again. "Now this could sweep the country. It's like snakes-and-ladders—you know how *that* works."

The board was marked out in a progressive series of squares, forming a pathway leading to the centre, which was labelled: "Sight, Hearing, Speech." He read the words: "Meet Mrs. Bannister—Go Forward Six Squares," and farther on: "Trip Over Steps—Go back Four."

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Swallowing, he said: "I think we'd better both have a drink."

Nodding yet more vigorously, Jack Lett said: "Sure thing, Captain—I knew you'd be interested. Here's something else again."

Charles Bannister turned with the drink in his hand, wondering what more could be coming. He saw that Jack Lett was now nursing a doll.

"The Esther Costello Doll," he explained with pride. "The eyes open." He tipped the doll, and pointed. The eyeballs had been painted white. "The mouth moves." He squeezed the neck, and the doll's lips moved—soundlessly. "There's nothing to the ears," he said regretfully. "But the rest is authentic. The hair is nylon. The kids will be wild for this one."

He took the proffered glass. "Here's to the future. We could certainly make it a bright one."

As he drank, Charles Bannister's only thought was: "Belle isn't going to like this at all." But it was not a consideration that had a great deal of weight by now.

It was very much later when Jack Lett took his leave: much later, and much further on. Between them, they had come to a provisional agreement. Lett was to use Esther's name on various products and toys, all of which had to be approved by Charles Bannister. "Preserve dignity," said the latter, by now somewhat drunk as well as inspired. "Very important."

There would be a royalty on each article produced. The use of her name would be exclusive to Jack Lett. Advertising would be tied up with their tours and lectures. Their ideas poured out, matching the whisky. They were in the mood in which victories are plotted, empires built, presidents nominated. But Jack Lett's best idea came towards the end.

"We want to get the kids really organized," he said dreamily. He had mellowed somewhat during the long session: he now sounded like a benevolent uncle planning a birthday for them both.

"Form a nation-wide club—the Esther Costello Junior Club—something like that. Get them to collect money, help at the meetings. Dress them up." His eyes brightened. "Sell them a uniform—Irish type—an apron with a shamrock, a green hat: the Esther Costello outfit."

Charles Bannister started to speak, and Jack Lett raised his hand. "You don't have to worry," he said. "We'll keep it dignified."

"I was going to say," said Charles Bannister, "that I just thought of a good name for them." He raised a portentous finger, emphasizing the punch line. "Not Hopalong—Tapalong. Because she's blind. The Tapalongs."

"And Esther," said Jack Lett, catching his mood, suddenly bursting with it, "can be at the top of the tree, the hidden secret figure in the middle. The mystic Colleen Tapalong. Charlie," he said—and Charles Bannister no longer winced—"Charlie, you're a genius."

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"Genius" was not among the many words which Mrs. Bannister used, when confronted with these plans next morning. For one of the few times in her joint life with Charles Bannister, she was lividly angry, and she made the fact clear, in a stormy interview which they both remembered for long afterwards.

More memorable still was the fact that it was the last time that she opposed her husband, where Esther was concerned. Thereafter, defeated, she let him have his way. But before she got to that point, many things were said that widened for ever the gulf between them.

"You can't do it, Charles," she said, again and again. "I'm not going to allow it. It's not fair to Esther. She's happy, everything's going well, we make plenty of money. Why spoil it with all this"—she searched for a word—"this exploitation?"

"It's not spoiling it," said Charles Bannister. He was liverish and irritable after the long session of the night before, and he felt in the mood for a showdown. Very soon the moment for that would come. "I'm just extending it a bit, that's all."

"Extending it? It's the rottenest idea you've ever produced! No, Charles," she shook her head vehemently. "You've got to leave things as they are. I'm not going to have the kid ruined like this."

Charles Bannister ground out his cigarette, and looked across at her coldly. "You're going to do exactly what I say," he told her, in his most even voice. "Let's get that straight. *I'm* running this show. We agreed on that, a very long time ago."

"We didn't agree to a lot of trash like this." She motioned contemptuously towards the litter of objects that lay between them on the table: the dog, the doll, the snakes-and-ladders game, the trio of monkey-like figures—all of them forlorn, ugly, and indecent in the morning sunlight. "Just look at them. If you had two cents' worth of shame in you, you'd throw the lot out into the street."

"Well, I haven't that two cents' worth, and you should know it by now." His voice was tough and edgy. "We're going ahead with all this"—he gestured, as she had done, but with satisfaction instead of disgust—"with the toys, and the trade mark, and the club as well. It's a natural development of what we've been doing in the past. We'd be fools not to expand when we've got the chance . . . Jack Lett is working on it now."

"But it's so—so undignified." Faced with his intransigence, she sought for an argument valid within the framework of his own reasoning. "People won't like it. They'll turn against her."

"This is America," he answered, offensively. "They won't turn against her, because it's how they expect a girl like Esther to be handled. Jack Lett has the right idea. So far, we've only been playing with Esther. That idea of a children's club is a stroke of genius."

"It's a stroke of swindling." Now she could hardly find the words she sought: her mouth, ugly with anger and weakness,

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worked with difficulty round the tumbling syllables. "I'll take her away from all this—I'll hide her. You won't do this to her."

"I'll do anything I want, anything I choose." Suddenly he was standing up, looking at her with intense hatred and disdain. It was the moment of onslaught. "All those arguments I used, when I first arrived here—they're still as good as they ever were. You've been evading all the charity laws, for years on end—you *know* you have—and as for the Income Tax people"—he grinned suddenly, sardonically—"it's murder, out-and-out murder! You can't fight me, Belle, and it's no use trying. You'll either do exactly as I say, or you'll have an inquiry into the finances of this thing on your hands. Whichever way it goes, you'll be finished."

"I'd rather be finished." But already there was a fatal edge of defeat in her voice. "Esther will crack up, anyway, if you make her do too much. She's terribly tired, right now."

"That's your part of the job." By this stage, the subtle alchemy which decides all battles, for or against, had nearly worked itself out: the colours in the crucible had changed, and they both knew that Mrs. Bannister was in retreat.

"You keep her going, I do the managing, Jack Lett handles the commercial side. If she's tired, deal with it! Give her a shot of something. Hire a doctor. Get a nurse. Your job is to keep her fit—and it's the least of our worries, anyway. Look," he said reasonably, and she knew it was his old trick of seeming to relent on the crest of victory, "give it a chance. Jack Lett and I will do a moderate amount of promotion, on the new lines. Just wait and see what happens on the journey home."

"It'll spoil everything," she repeated, feebly.

"It'll make us . . . Just you wait and see."

The journey home, to New York and then to Boston, was indeed a spectacular success. That moderate amount of promotion which Charles Bannister had proposed, left nothing to chance: everything about it—bookings, advertising, radio time, personal appearances, local contacts—all were handled with a degree of skill and a sureness of touch which convinced him, more strongly than ever, that Jack Lett's inclusion in their organization was not a mistake.

Before they set out, Jack Lett went on ahead, bearing not only the tidings of the Esther Costello Club (which had been launched in Hollywood), but with invoices for several hundred thousand Esther Costello products, already ordered in advance, and a cabin-trunk full of samples to drum up further business. From the very start, the idea caught on.

The dolls sold, the dogs sold, the monkey-figures sold; the snakes-and-ladders game (renamed Tapalong) became a current epidemic, and Tapalong tournaments supplanted everything. But it was the Esther Costello Club—for girls only—which set all hearts a-beating. Here also they kept the name Tapalong and

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the proposed sale of uniforms to members : the latter rose in grade from Junior Tapalong, in accord with the number of members they enrolled, at a dollar a time.

The uniform also followed the line that Jack Lett had planned : it consisted of a white linen apron embroidered with harps, and a kind of beret in the form of a three-leafed shamrock with *Tapalong Club* printed on the border and the stalk hanging down at the back.

By the time the party reached New York, the club was solidly established ; and the rally which they held there set the seal on what was already a national institution.

Four hundred club members, in their uniforms, made up the guard of honour : Esther " spoke " for over an hour ; and at the end the collection, taken up by the children wielding green shamrock bags at the end of long white wands, brought in nearly twenty thousand dollars.

" White wands ? " said Charles Bannister later, querying a modest item in the expense account. " Why white ? "

" She's blind," said Jack Lett cheerfully. " It's quite legitimate."

New York was the peak of triumph, Boston the warm clamour of home-coming. Esther had left her adopted town as a local celebrity, whose name in a Boston headline rang a familiar bell with most readers ; she returned, six months later, as a national asset with a coast-to-coast following.

Jack Lett, going on ahead as usual to prepare the way, found that there was little to do save co-ordinate Press publicity for Esther's arrival, and then for her first big meeting ; the Boston branch of the Esther Costello Club was already established, and, thanks to his local agents, sales of the various games and toys were booming. There was no doubt that Esther Costello had arrived.

But there was no doubt either that, in spite of the nation's acclaim, she was still Boston's own ; and Barry Grant of the *Star-Telegram*, who met their party at the station, subsequently wrote up their arrival in a two-column, half-page spread. Secretly, Mrs. Bannister had been worrying about what he might say : she had noticed him looking somewhat askance at the Tapalong Guard of Honour on the platform, and to her mind he must surely be thinking that the whole thing had become far too streamlined, forfeiting altogether the gentler atmosphere of Esther's first appearances. She had feared some acid kind of comment . . . But he must have decided to let it go, for he made no mention of this aspect.

Only in his longer piece, when he covered the welcome-home rally, was there a slight hint, towards the end, that he remembered a more subdued Esther, a less slick entourage, a simpler pity.

The leader-page account of this meeting—the greater part of which was later distributed by Jack Lett, in photostat form, to 150,000 schools throughout the United States—marked the crowning moment of Esther's triumph. It was a good piece,

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halfway between reporting and comment; even Ryan, the news-editor, who had hesitated about giving Grant a free hand, was pleased with it.

It told of the ovation which the packed audience accorded to Esther: of the emotional climax as she rose to "speak" and answer questions; and of the mood of lyrical adoration in which the audience had bid her goodnight. Of this last, Grant spoke with special tenderness.

"There they sat, together on the platform," he wrote, in a passage which had Ryan frowning throughout: "Mrs. Bannister in white, Esther in pale blue. The girl was obviously tired, after her long ordeal—she was white-faced and listless. By her side, Mrs. Bannister was a compassionate and wonderfully loving figure.

"Presently it was time to say good-bye—and for Esther, after the 'speaking,' the questions, the effort of communication, it seemed a moment of grateful release. Our eyes returned again and again to this young girl who was and is the centre of an extraordinary miracle. To us, she seemed all things: young, lovely, accomplished—and fatally stricken. There can have been very few eyes among us quite free of tears as we watched her still figure.

"We in the audience wished her goodnight. Mrs. Bannister was constantly speaking to her, telling her all that was said. We hoped that she was passing on to Esther *everything*—our love, our admiration, our hope that perhaps some day, somehow, somewhere, in spite of all the odds against her, she might come back to the world again.

"Then she left the platform, gently guided by the wonderful woman who is her eyes, ears, and tongue. The audience surged towards her with their hearts full, striving to give her a last moment of warmth and love. The children in their strange uniforms, which we must now accept as part of the Esther Costello legend, formed round her at the door. Then she was gone.

"Gone—but leaving many lasting things behind her: leaving tears, emotion, hopes, pity, love.

"Dispersing to our homes, we remembered her as our own Esther, an Irish waif adopted by this city, given hope here, given contact at last with the outside world, by the loving care of a great woman.

"That is all that need matter to us. Forget the 'Esther Costello' toys, forget the dressed-up children and the stagey presentation. These are extras—new additions to our own central, simple figure.

"May such things never obscure her, never spoil the Esther Costello we know, love, wonder at, and pray for."

THE suite at the Bristol was wonderfully luxurious, by any standard: Mrs. Bannister was prepared to admit that where comfort was concerned, some British hotels could give America

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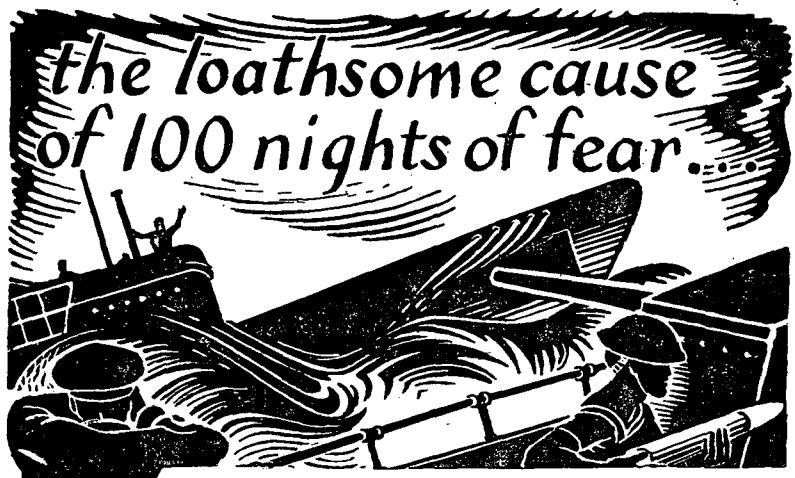

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a smart sort of lesson. The sitting-room looked out over the west of London, allowing her a wide view of rooftops, the trees of green and distant Hyde Park, the hazy warmth of an English summer in town. When she turned from this view to the room again, its elegance and receptive colouring completed a picture with no flaw in it.

Even her husband, lolling deep in an armchair as if he had lived in the Bristol all his life, and Jack Lett, shirt-sleeved, murdering a cigar as he paced up and down, could not spoil her sense of well-being. If she had to be in England, this was the city to be in, this was the hotel to stay at, this was the time of the year to make the visit.

It was after lunch: Esther was resting: there was no meeting that night, and therefore no more cares for that day. Lunch, as usual, had been a very good one. At that moment, in spite of the strenuous routine that underlay everything they did these days, in spite of one other factor that lay in the back of her mind, she wanted nothing changed.

Charles Bannister said: "Sit down, Jack, for God's sake. You're making me giddy."

Jack Lett turned, on the ball of one foot, like a dancer. He looked, as he always did, bustling, energetic, forceful: the coiled mainspring of the Esther Costello enterprise.

Jack Lett looked down at him. "Only way I can think," he said briskly. "And I've got plenty of things to think about."

"What things?" asked Charles Bannister. He did not really want to know: he was contented, slightly muzzy, after the drinks and the long lunch. But he was never prepared to give Jack Lett a free hand, within any part of the organization: he tried always to make the point that Lett's work was only a small proportion of the total of their activities, even though it was clear that the business side of the Guild, the actual selling of Esther Costello products, was looming larger and larger every day.

He remembered that Jack Lett had taken to calling himself Business Manager, and he frowned, and repeated: "What things?" as curtly as he could. Esther Costello was still a Charles Bannister promotion, and she was going to remain so.

"Australia, chiefly," answered Lett. "It seems a hell of a long way to go, just for three weeks' tour. We ought to make it longer."

"That's a policy matter," said Charles Bannister briefly, like a nurse dismissing a child with—you'll know when you're grown-up.

"Before I mapped out the tour, I had to decide the total amount of time we could spend away from America. I didn't want to make it more than six months, at the outside."

"Why not?" Jack Lett was like Bannister himself, in being impervious to snubbing, unabashed by protocol. "A year wouldn't be too long. I've got a lot of selling to do, before we get back from this world trip."

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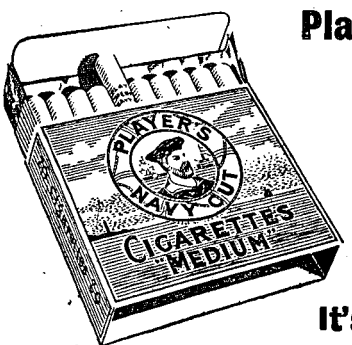

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"In a year, people in America might have time to forget Esther." Charles Bannister, irritated by being lured into discussion, slopped out some more brandy into his balloon glass, and sipped at it, frowning. "That's something I want to avoid."

"But she's making other friends, all the time. It evens out. And America won't forget her so soon, anyway. Not with the kids' clubs working on it the way they are."

"It's dangerous, none the less. America is still our top priority. That's where the money is."

Standing by the window, Mrs. Bannister broke in, with an old argument. "We never really needed to leave home," she said to her husband. "We were doing all right, just on the American basis."

The two men smiled at each other. On this point at least, they were in full agreement.

"Esther's big enough to be a world figure," said Charles Bannister complacently. "This tour will make her just that. Look what's happened here in London—a riot. Look at the press coverage. They may not buy the uniforms, or the games—"

"Games are O.K.," Jack Lett chipped in. "Twenty-two per cent up on last week."

"—But they do come to the meetings," Bannister continued, ignoring him, "and they do give to the Guild. The same thing's going to happen in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada —wherever we go. We'll come back to the States on top of the wave."

"With a lot of money, too . . . A guy asked me yesterday what we did with the profits."

"I hope you told him," said Charles Bannister austerely.

"What? And land us all in gaol?"

"We make very substantial donations to charity, and we are building up the Guild all the time." Charles Bannister's voice was positively Victorian in rebuke.

"And we're all living at the Bristol." Jack Lett grinned, not innocently.

"We are living at the Bristol because it is comfortable for Esther."

"So central, too . . . Just who are you trying to convince?"

Charles Bannister frowned. "We depend completely on the public's confidence. It's very important that all our actions should be above reproach. I deprecate"—he said, looking exceptionally statesman-like—"I deprecate any loose talk on the subject."

"Then you'd better make a big donation to some blind charity. And create a lot of noise about it, too."

"Our prime duty is to the Guild. We have to place it on a solid basis, first."

Jack Lett grinned again, glancing round the room. "This basis looks solid enough to me. Look, Charlie, I'm only trying

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to help. I've no complaints myself: my side of it is a gold mine—we both know that—and I don't want to interfere with yours. But if people really started talking, it would kill us all. That's why I say, come across with a pretty solid donation now, while we're in England. It'll pay us a dividend, in the end."

"I think he's right, Charles," said Mrs. Bannister. "Surely we can afford a few thousand dollars."

"Of course we can afford it. The central Guild fund now stands at"—he checked himself—"at a very substantial figure. But I don't want people to get into the way of thinking that we can answer every call on us. We have to build up a solid reserve."

"I think," said Jack Lett, "that you ought to distribute not less than twenty per cent."

"There's no point in going to extremes," answered Bannister coldly. He stood up, brandy glass in hand: dapper, correct, well-tailored. "It's a policy matter," he said, swaying slightly, repeating the magic, exclusive phrase. "You can leave that sort of thing to me."

Jack Lett turned towards the door, shrugging it all off. "Well, I've got to meet a man. Are we having dinner here in the hotel?"

"Yes. I thought we might take Esther down to the restaurant. People like to see her."

"She's tired," objected Mrs. Bannister. "And we've got that farewell meeting at the end of the week, before we sail."

"She doesn't look tired," said her husband. "She never does. Wonderful girl." His tone was dwelling. "I'd like to take her down to dinner. It makes me feel twenty years younger, just to look at her."

Mrs. Bannister stared at him, speculatively. "That would make you thirty-five, Charles."

"A man is as old as he feels," he answered largely. "Wonderful girl," he repeated. It was the brandy talking. "Best-looking girl in London. No wonder people stare at her." His voice, unguarded, slurring, had a lickerish edge to it. "In fact, I stare at her myself."

I stare at her myself . . . Mrs. Bannister, strolling in Hyde Park in the late afternoon sunshine, pondered the remark, and all its implications. She knew that it was true, and she knew it could be disastrous.

There was no room for ambiguity, in at least two things. Esther *was* lovely—now nearly twenty, she was in the full tide of her glowing beauty.

Charles *was* a completely unprincipled man, accustomed to taking whatever he wanted. Put the two of them together . . . It would not matter to him that Esther was defenceless. It would not matter to him that she was as innocent as air. It would not matter that, at his age, such a liaison would be especially degrading, even apart from its grotesque cruelty. If Charles felt like it, he would do it.

She knew now that he did feel like it. There had been many

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indications, some faint, some strong, all of them conclusive—if one knew Charles Bannister.

It was a pity they were in London. She looked around her at the green of the Park, the red buses and the traffic through the trees, the lovers and the children lying on the grass. It should have been wonderful, but all it meant was that they were now in Charles's own setting—he was securely at home, and he grew in stature and authority with every day they stayed there.

Already, he was quite beyond her control: he drank far too much, he lived (as they all did) at a pitch of extravagance which endangered their reputation. But there could be no argument with him: this was his own home-ground, where he felt he could do as he liked. He had been poor here, now he was rich: it meant that he would take whatever he chose. Part of what he chose was going to be Esther.

Mrs. Bannister stood stock-still, miserable, jealous, and afraid. She had come a long way with Esther: a loving way, a tiring way, a triumphant way. Now the whole thing was in fearful danger—because she had been so successful, because Esther, her own creation, was so lovely and so vulnerable. Now the girl was likely to be destroyed, for the second time.

As usual with Charles Bannister, there was nothing to be done about it.

She collected her thoughts, and began to retrace her steps, across the Park towards the hotel.

She let herself into the suite quietly, closing the door with a furtive hand. She crossed to her own room, still treading softly, and entered it. She did not switch on the lights. Instead, she walked to the window that gave on to the balcony, and looked out, enjoying, as always, the view of London at dusk. There was magic in the lights, entrancement in the pale night sky above the rooftops: the traffic noises far below whispered like a nocturne. Then a slight movement on the balcony outside caught her eye.

A few yards along, level with Esther's room, which adjoined her own, a man was crouching.

She knew now why she had entered the suite like a conspirator; she knew that the man was Charles, and she knew what he was doing. He was looking through the curtains into Esther's room, where Esther was either in bed, or dressing for the evening.

Sick at heart, powerless before evil, she opened the communicating door and went into the next room. Without surprise, she saw that Esther was standing before her wardrobe, naked, feeling for some underclothes on one of the upper shelves. Her slim body, reaching upwards, had a flawless grace.

Not looking towards the window, ignoring the gap in the curtain, Mrs. Bannister touched the girl gently on the shoulder, and then began to help her. She felt herself trembling, and her protective back, now placed between Esther and the window, seemed to be on fire.

Mrs. Bannister had no idea what to do, except never to leave

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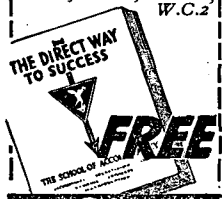

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Esther undefended. She had the desperate hope that if she could only stave off the crisis until they left England, it would make a vital difference: once out of London, Charles Bannister would surely shrink again, and lose his dangerous quality, and become manageable

She blamed herself for not having foreseen this disgusting turn of events—or rather, for having foreseen it and yet decided that it could not possibly happen. She remembered a thousand things that had been pointers, as sharp as needles, towards the present situation.

They had been living too close together, all the time. She had seen Charles eyeing the girl, letting his eyes slide down from throat to waist, from waist to thigh, unguarded in lust, secure in Esther's blindness—and she had still thought: he *can't* intend to do a thing like that.

She had noticed him helping Esther, leading her forward with an arm round her waist, once fondling her neck as he helped to fasten her necklace. She had allowed him to hold the girl's hand and arm, trying—or pretending to try—to communicate with her as she did herself.

She had watched him exploit all the furtive contacts to which Esther was exposed, under the cloak of "guidance"—hand on elbow or shoulder as she went through a doorway, hand on waist or thigh as her chair-cushion was adjusted. She had seen her husband meanly taking advantage of all these opportunities—and then seen his eyes and face change, as he became aware that he was being watched.

She had observed all these things, for many months past; and she had done nothing, because she had hoped that the ugly affair would resolve itself. Now she was not sure that there could be any solution, save in flight or in the last dishonour—for him to slake his body at the blind fountain he desired.

Peace lay over the Bristol suite. They were due to sail in a few days' time on the Australian leg of the tour; most of their luggage, already packed, had gone down to the steamship offices, and their rooms now seemed bare and impermanent, waiting for them to leave. It was a suspended moment, a moment of silence and uncertainty.

Mrs. Bannister, packing the last of Esther's clothes, went down the short corridor and into the girl's bathroom, to sort out the things she would need on the voyage. The room was clean and bright, the sunlight falling on the polished tiles and reflecting long, mote-filled shafts from there on to the ceiling; it was an enclosed hygienic box, lined with mirrors, steam-warmed and perfumed, a room for nakedness, relaxation, private security.

With her hand poised to open the medicine-chest above the wash-basin, Mrs. Bannister heard a slight movement behind her. She turned, startled, but found nothing—nothing save the wind rustling the waterproof curtains that hung round the shower.

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They were still trembling slightly, slurring against the tiled wall, as she turned back again. Then, on the instant, it was she who was trembling, as she noticed something else about the bathroom.

It had a single window, and that window was closed. There could, therefore, be no draught, to make the shower curtains move

When, turning once more, she called out: "Charles . . ." she could hardly articulate, so tightly strangled was her dry throat.

The curtains moved again. Charles Bannister's face appeared between them, inquiringly. He was not taken aback: he was even smiling.

"Hope I didn't startle you," he said. "I was just looking at this tap. It's leaking."

For a split second she thought of accepting the absurd explanation, and passing the whole thing off. Then the tide of her fear and horror returned to engulf her, and she swallowed and said: "You were waiting here to watch Esther."

"Don't be absurd, Belle." There was still no embarrassment in his voice: she could not remember a better performance, in all their long years together.

"What on earth would I do that for?"

"You wanted to watch her." Mrs. Bannister's voice was choking with disgust. "It's her own bathroom. She always uses it. But, *I* came in instead."

His face between the shower curtains was gravely controlled: only his words were false and lying, not meeting her own at all. It was as if they were drawing further and further apart: it reminded her of a nightmare, when one person strives to behave normally, while another conducts some insane antic. The two of them could never meet, never eliminate the hideous ground that lay between.

In the face of his bland and insolent assurance, her own excited loathing was beginning to look foolish. For the thousandth time in her life—even now at this special pitch of guilt—she could not prick his guard.

"If you hurt her, Charles," she said at last, intensely, "it will finish everything. I'll go to the police."

His face, mildly surprised, regarded hers steadily.

"I don't know what you're talking about." He stepped between the curtains, and out onto the cork floor: she saw that he was in his shirt-sleeves, and carried some kind of wrench or spanner in his hand. He held it out to her.

"See?" he said amiably. "I was fixing the tap."

"You were waiting for Esther."

He shook his head, as if the situation were beyond him. "Very well," he said cheerfully, "I *was* waiting for her."

His unabashed and smiling face, mature, experienced, elegantly framed by the iron-grey hair, was more than she could stomach. She shouted at him, suddenly, beyond control, "Is there any rotten thing in the world you wouldn't do?"

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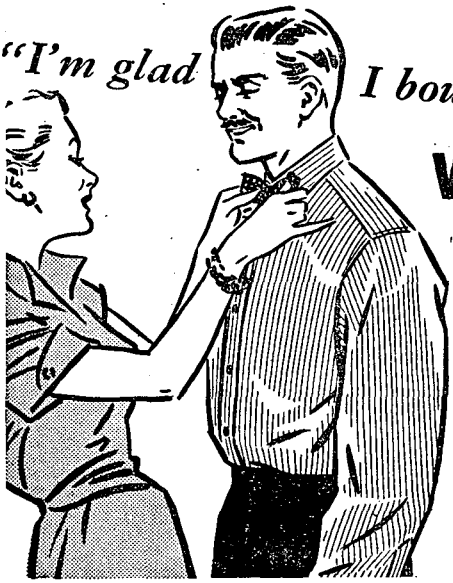

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"The tap," he said quietly. It was the lunatic, nightmare answer once more. "It leaks. I was fixing it."

"If you harm her," she said, "I'll kill you!"

"I wouldn't harm her." She saw that he was now laughing quietly. "Never . . . I'm *much* too fond of her."

It was like a siege, a siege with the enemy already within the ramparts: a jungle with the bandit waiting in silence beneath the trees, ears cocked for the snap of a twig. It was like the doors double-locked for the night, and the burglar within; it was the zoo gardens at dusk, with the gates closed and the cages left open. It was the food, gratefully swallowed, that will swell and choke in the throat; the welcomed caress that turns to throttling.

That particular night, the night before they sailed, Charles Bannister got drunk at dinner; otherwise, Mrs. Bannister would never have left him alone in the hotel. But by nine o'clock he was snoring on the sitting-room sofa: she had some friends she wanted to say good-bye to, and she welcomed the chance of leaving him, with a clear conscience, and going out. The unrelaxed surveillance of the past few days had been getting on her nerves.

Esther was in her own room, with the door locked. Jack Lett would be back from his party before very long. There was nothing that could go wrong. She could still hear Charles's steady snores as she let herself out of the front door.

Esther had laid down her Braille edition of *David Copperfield*, and was drowsing in bed, when she felt the draught from the open window strike upon her bare arms, and ruffle her hair.

For a moment she was puzzled, and then she decided that Mrs. Bannister must have come in, as she had promised to do, and opened the balcony window to the cool of the night. She waited without anxiety for the touch on her shoulder which would be her familiar greeting.

The greeting did not come. Instead, the draught on her arms died to nothing again, and she felt the vibration of uneven footsteps on the floor near her bed. She raised her nostrils, and sniffed. There was the cigar smell—and the queer smell that Mrs. Bannister said was whisky—and then the smell of a man . . . She drew the bedclothes high around her shoulders, and waited uneasily. This was something outside her experience.

It was the first of many such things. There began to take place around her a series of movements which at first puzzled and then terrified her. There were twitchings on the bedclothes around her shoulders, a furtive hand in her hair, then on her shoulder, then exploring beneath the covers themselves.

At this last, she whimpered soundlessly within her throat, and stretched out her arms, trying to ward off something she could not see and did not understand. Her arms touched nothing—and while she was thus groping, other arms came up beneath her guard and clutched her round the waist.

The bed moved sharply as someone lurched or fell against it.

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A living weight materialized upon the lower half of her body.

Then there was a fearful pause, with nothing in her world; and then a hand closed on her bared breast, and another began to fumble and pluck incomprehensibly at her thighs. She fought and cried out, and continued to fight and cry all through the crude disposal of her body; but the scrabbling hands and the rest of it soon lost their incomprehensibility—they were suddenly, loathsomely tied to whispers and sniggers heard long years ago, to her own questionings, her own warm desires.

When she had screamed and fought and lost her blind battle, she bore all things under a crescendo of pain; but there was still a small margin of horror left when presently she found that she could *see* the shape of a man leaving her, and *hear* the sound of his moaning breath.

So Esther awoke once more to the full delights of the world.

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No. 7

Rules of Entry on page 84

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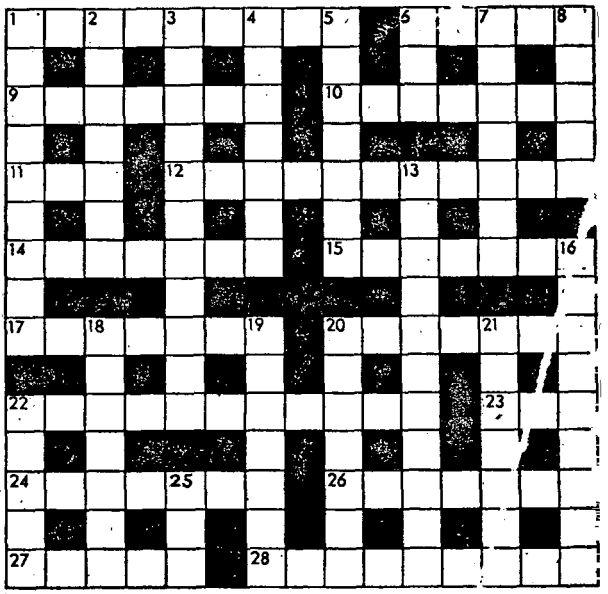

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CUT ALONG THIS LINE

CLUES

Across

1 This little bird consists of itself and a quadruped (9).

6 Uncle or courage (5).

9 Prince with a province in Canada ? (7).

10 " When I know more of tactics than a novice in a — " (Gilbert) (7).

11 A little violin that might be carried by a soldier (3).

12 All of them were unable to reconstitute an egg (3, 5, 3).

14 Do they give this one to drink when flying ? (7).

15 It sounds an ill-natured sort of carriage (7).

17 I sail on, and form a connection (7).

20 Canal boat (7).

22 Don't take these pessimists to bed (3, 8).

23 A cheerful eighteenth-century poet (3).

24 A twisted eel finished by a French glove is well-dressed (7).

26 I tear in—to become apathy itself (7).

27 If your luck is out, you can still be a good one (5).

28 A cipher system to be learnt by convicts, perhaps ? (5, 4).

Down

1 Sombre armour for a felony (9).

2 This crustacean can easily be made into a pillow (7).

3 Ancient Roman office held by Bonaparte (5, 6).

4 These are assumed to be your dearest relatives (7).

5 Capital punishment in the Babylonian gardens ? (7).

6 Professorial hidalgo (3).

7 The marl seems to contain hot springs (7).

8 The composer could b- hand- (5).

13 I. sounds like a rising o- lane, but in fact you meet - at sea (11).

16 Suggests that the girl - willing to be dressed "off th- -g" (5-4).

18 " For my voice, I hav- lost it with hollaing an- singing of— " (Shakespeare (7).

19 You'll find it in Alg non's top drawer (7).

20 Keats wrote on this kin- of urn (7).

21 " It is, but hadn't —— —— be ! " (Bret Harte) (5, 2).

22 Military evolution associated with St. Catherine (5).

25 Something to do with grievances (3).

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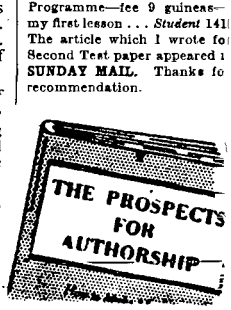
Student 357/3015: I have had story accepted by **BLACKWOO** who are paying me £25 for it. *Student* 778/2119: I thought might interest you to know t **THE COUNTRYMAN** has acce a short article of mine on an country custom . . . *Stu* 184/315: As you suggested submitted the articles to the N **STATESMAN**. One was publi on the 17th July. I have also an article accepted by **MEN O** . . . *Student* 181/282: You ma interested to hear that I ha letter from the Editor of **ARGO** they have offered me Twenty Guineas for my story . . . *Stu* 591/287: You will be pleased my article submitted for my Se Lesson was published in the D **MIRROR** and I received Guineas for it . . . *Student* 120/ I have established contact the Editor of **PUNCH**. The was accepted for "Chariva and is a good start . . . *Stu* 1179/347: I succeeded in ge four Big Game stories **COURIER** and another a "Shrove Tuesday." An article appeared in the A issue of **BLACKWOODS** *Student* 1954/157: I have corrected a proof of my stor **WIDE WORLD**; they have accepted another and I have in a third . . . *Student* 171/ I have sold my story to EV **WOMAN** for 25 guineas *Student* 1106/156: The B accepted the script for the Programme—fee 9 guineas— my first lesson . . . *Student* 141 The article which I wrote fo Second Test paper appeared i **SUNDAY MAIL**. Thanks fo recommendation.



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